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Pupils' choices in their educational and career trajectories

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SUBMISSION OF THESIS FOR A RESEARCH DEGREE

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the effect of social background on pupils' choices of educational and career pathways. A group of 18 pupils, chosen from a single Comprehensive School in the North West of England, was followed from the ages of 13 to 16 as they encountered the options available to them when they chose their GCSE subjects. Data were collected principally through focus group interviews with the pupils. The interviews were timed to coincide with key stages in the options process before and after the choices were made. Additional interviews were carried out with individual parents and members of staff at the school. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital were used in the analysis of the data, which revealed evidence to support Bourdieu's notion that forms of capital are reproduced through investment by the family. Pupils with disadvantaged backgrounds were less likely to opt for Higher Education especially if it involved study at a significant distance from home.

A survey of the development of the English education system since the 1944 Education Act is used to support the conclusion that schools are also a significant agent for cultural reproduction. The school at the centre of the survey used data supplied and processed by the Fischer Family Trust to assist with the target setting process, and evidence suggested that this process was employed by the school as a mechanism to support progress towards targets set for it by the National Government. The support given to individual pupils to achieve targets set for them therefore became disconnected from the educational need of the individual.

Key words: habitus; cultural capital; social capital; reproduction; equality

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Pupils' choices in their educational and career trajectories

Chapter one

Background to the research

1.1 Aims of the thesis

This thesis explores how pupils in the age group 14-16 make choices about their educational and career futures. I seek to find a connection between the choices they make and the context of educational and social (in)equalities against which they are located, through an analysis using the concepts of capital, field and habitus as described in the work of Pierre Bourdieu. As the pupils negotiate the field of education, their dispositions are shaped principally by their family background, and by their different abilities to negotiate social structures presented to them by the school they attend.

In parallel with the investigation into pupils' social encounters with the education system, I shall investigate the procedures used by the school to structure the education of the pupils through the curriculum provided and the expectations set.

It is a small-scale qualitative study designed to illuminate the issues rather than draw any conclusions of a general nature. In this introductory chapter, I will set out the background to the research, and my own position in it. I have experienced the UK educational system as a school pupil, university student, school teacher, parent, and university lecturer. All of these experiences have had their influence on me, and have affected my outlook on educational policy and practice. The first step in this thesis is

therefore to declare my position in it, and to demonstrate how my career has progressed towards a perceived need to investigate issues of equality in education.

1.2 A personal journey through the education system

My school education took place in an era when most pupils attended a selective system of education, though this was undergoing significant change by the time I became a teacher in the mid-1970s. In the 1980s the education system underwent a further number of significant changes, which I chart in chapter three, leading to the situation at the start of the research project in 2006.

It is not possible to separate this piece of research from my own journey through the education system, a journey which began in 1959, and continues to the present day in a professional capacity. I have to recognise that my perspective in this research is dependent upon this journey and deeply affected by it. I first ‘knew’ I would be going to University at the age of nine. I had a small savings account and casually asked my mother what it was for. “For when you go to University” was the reply. From that point it never entered my head that I would not study at University.

As I progressed through the education system, various decisions were made on my behalf and without my explicit knowledge until I reached the age of 14. These decisions determined the infant and primary schools I attended, chosen because of where we lived. As my father taught modern languages at a London public school, my elder brother attended this in preference to the local primary school, but when I reached primary school age we had moved north to Yorkshire, where I attended the local state primary school in a suburb of Sheffield.

I recall strongly that in my final year of primary school I was being assessed for entry into the local Grammar School. The scheme of assessment (The Thorne Scheme) had just replaced the eleven-plus examination (Crook 2002) taken (and passed) by my

elder brother and sister. Although I was aware of the implications, and was acutely aware of those friends and acquaintances who were offered places at the local schools (either Grammar School or Secondary Modern), I had little to do but accept the outcome brought about by my attainment during that year. One of my best friends (we sat together in class) was to my surprise unsuccessful. Gaining a place at the Grammar School was, to my friends and me, success. A place at the Secondary Modern was seen as a failure. At the end of that academic year, another career move for my father resulted in a move to the Lake District, where I attended the local Grammar School. Part of the rationale for these career moves was my father's strongly-held belief in the two- (or three-) tier system, and perhaps inevitably as a youngster it seemed right to me, though I was only vaguely aware that this choice was being exercised on my behalf.

It was not until I reached the age of 14 that I was able to make my own mind up concerning any aspect of my education, and even then the choices of O-level subject available were limited. Such limitations in choice were not unusual in the 1960s, and as Jones (2003) points out, many efforts were made at curriculum reform at this time to take account of the diversity of the population. As I was in the 'A' stream, I was not allowed to choose Art, and instead had either Latin or Chemistry. I took the latter, and headed towards a career in science. The first really significant choice (significant in the sense that it involved a decision which would have a tangible effect on possible career trajectories) took place at the end of my O-levels, when I reached the age of 16 and was legally allowed to leave school. Such a decision would have been unthinkable in my family however, and my choice was really in the subjects I would study for A-level. In this case, my choices were for the subjects in which I enjoyed most success – again in the sciences – to ensure sufficient grades for University entry. I can recall little in the way of advice or guidance towards a career, other than to note that it was clear that a

‘career’ was the expected goal post-degree. My choice at the age of 18 was not whether to go to university, but which university to attend and which subject to study. I was encouraged by my parents and teachers to apply for a place at Cambridge University, but was not successful. I attended instead a ‘red brick’ university – Sheffield University – which has now become one of the established ‘Russell Group’ universities. At the time, in the early 1970s, it had a strong reputation in the sense that a degree from that university would be regarded well by future employers, and the subject I was reading was in one of the ‘harder’ sciences. Without being aware, I was gravitating towards the accumulation of valuable cultural capital.

Throughout school and university education, I found the accumulation of qualifications relatively straightforward, and regarded it as normal progression. At all times, choices were towards subjects and institutions which enjoyed relatively high status, and in the context of this research project, that is highly significant.

I continued at Sheffield University to train as a teacher, and my first teaching post was at a boys’ Grammar School in the North West, in a Local Authority which turned out to contain the school at which the research was carried out. Under an area re-organisation in the late 1980s, a Comprehensive education system was introduced to the Local Authority, and I transferred to a local Comprehensive School, at which I would teach in various roles (including being IT co-ordinator and Physics teacher) for the next 22 years. It was while I taught here that my attitude started to change – as a Grammar School teacher for the previous six years I had not encountered children from the lower ability range and began to appreciate the wide variety of abilities as well as backgrounds. The school had 8 forms of entry at the time of the research, divided in year 10 into two broadly equal halves according to pupil ability. Very few pupils in the lower-ability group ever achieved better in Science than a grade D at GCSE (General

Certificate of Secondary Education, taken at age 16), and had been entered for programmes which provided stimulation and interest for them (for example Horticulture).

My interest in issues of equality became aroused in this part of my school career and came about as a result of my involvement with a curriculum initiative in the early 1990s while I was Head of Science. One of the policies introduced by the Conservative Government via the Education Reform Act of 1988 was a National Curriculum which specified Science as one of the core subjects of the curriculum, and for the first time it became a compulsory subject at GCSE. Furthermore, the content of all GCSE Science curricula had to be balanced across the Sciences of Biology, Chemistry and Physics. As noted by Bell (1997) the reform was principally designed to address inequalities between the numbers of boys and girls choosing different sciences – for example Biology and Physics classes had been biased in numbers towards girls and boys respectively. The effect was that many schools imposed a curriculum in which Science occupied the teaching time of two subjects, with the content balanced across the three Sciences. This had the effect of alienating large numbers of lower-ability pupils, whose interest in science was often minimal, or at least limited to only one of the subjects, but who then had to work through material in topics of little interest to them.

During the late 1990s, a new initiative became available to my school which provided these youngsters with a potential solution: an opportunity to gain GCSEs in Science by means of a vocational programme designed to provide the stimulation and interest which would hopefully motivate the pupils to make better progress. Indeed, there was a marked improvement in results in the years which followed the introduction of this vocational course. However, in spite of this improvement in results, this scheme did not prove popular – many parents sought to take their children off the programme in

preference for the 'traditional' syllabus, and the local Sixth-Form college refused to acknowledge the new award below grade B. So it was clear that the two qualifications, which carried the same value on paper, did not merit equivalent status in practice.

Moreover, the issue of choice became moot: before the introduction of the National Curriculum pupils had been able to select which of the three Sciences they wished to study, but after the introduction of the vocational course they were again denied any real choice. Those pupils in the five highest-ability classes were entered for the 'traditional' dual award (though some high fliers could opt to take all three Sciences), and the remainder had to take the vocational course.

I was therefore interested to know what the pupils themselves thought of this process of 'choice': how they viewed the significance of their decisions, and how they related these decisions to their possible future career trajectories.

If these pupils had suffered some sort of disadvantage through their upbringing, then I reasoned that they had arrived at this point already on a trajectory which was at least partially beyond their control. This thesis is designed to examine the degree of choice pupils at this stage of their education (between the ages of 14 and 16) were able to exert over their career and education trajectories. To what extent are these choices influenced by their cultural and social background, and to what extent are they channelled into these choices by the school system and by society as a whole? As Morris, Rickinson and Davies (2001) discuss, careers advice is commonly provided from the age of 14 onwards, and so a focus on the 14-16 age group provides the opportunity to examine how this advice begins to shape the thinking of the pupils.

The thesis therefore focuses on exploring educational and career choices as social acts performed by young people as they pass from key stage three into key stage

four of their education. I was able to take an opportunity to study a group of pupils both before and after they chose their GCSE topics, and again while they contemplated their education beyond the age of 16.

1.3 The relative attainment of different social classes

Certain social groups have educational outcomes which fall well below the national average, whether we are discussing the accumulation of qualifications, or the length of time spent in education; and these same social groups are also under-represented in Higher Education. Government-sponsored projects have collected large quantities of data which repeatedly demonstrate this, and analysis (for example by Broecke and Hamed 2008) shows that gender, ethnicity and social class play an important part. The factor which remains highly significant after prior attainment has been taken into account is social class. It would appear that working-class children find it harder than middle-class children to gain the best outcomes from the education system in this country.

Thus children from families in social classes 1/2/3N ('middle-class', according to Reay, David and Ball 2005) fare better than those in social classes 3M/4/5 ('working-class'). Children from working-class backgrounds have persistently lagged behind middle-class children in accessing Higher Education (ibid). These observations remain valid even though the system of social classification was revised in 1998. In the data analysis, I use the more recent National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) described in Roberts (2011), but where researchers refer to the earlier system, it is still a valid and comparable measure.

There is a considerable body of research which demonstrates the under-representation of working-class students in Higher Education: Gazeley (2009) suggests that the gap begins very early on, and remains until adulthood; in other words

disadvantage present early in life is likely to impede the progress of a person throughout their educational career and beyond. Children with parents who have attended university are more likely to attend themselves than children with parents who have not attended university. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) refer to this as ‘Reproduction’ and the term is used by them to describe how class is re-produced from generation to generation in a process which enables the privileged classes to maintain their status and privilege. Bourdieu described how investment of forms of capital (economic, cultural and social) by families enable offspring to encounter social fields such as education more easily and successfully than their counterparts who lack this investment.

From the pupils’ perspective, the social and educational practices of the school are significant – do the school authorities value differently the participation of pupils from different backgrounds? There is a great deal of literature (Cole 2012, Perry and Francis 2010, Broecke and Hamed 2008) which compares pupil outcomes against ethnicity and gender as well as socioeconomic status. Consideration of ethnicity would normally be an important part of an investigation such as this one. However, in the case of this research, the number of minority ethnic pupils in the school studied was very small, and only one participant declared an ethnic origin other than White European, and therefore little data could be collected on this social dimension. For this reason, ‘ethnicity’ as a factor affecting social choices was removed from the research questions, leaving Social Class and Gender as the significant factors to be investigated.

1.4 Research Questions

My three Research Questions thus focus on the pupils’ decision-making process in terms of their educational and career progression, on the influences from their background and on the influences from the school system which come to bear on the process:

RQ1. How do individual pupils understand the process of career decision-making and construct their position towards this process, and what meaning and values do they assign to particular career paths?

RQ2. How do ‘social class’ and ‘gender’ underpin the pupils’ decision-making process, and to what extent are pupils able to understand and articulate this underpinning?

RQ3. What are the institutional influences on this process, and what are the pupils’ experiences of these influences?

1.5 Theoretical Framing

In the following two chapters I report on a literature review which covers a number of key areas: chapter two is concerned with the research background, and chapter three with the policy context.

I begin chapter two by exploring the theoretical background. The ideas of Pierre Bourdieu most frequently applied to education research are in the realm of social class and privilege, and are often used to investigate inequalities in the education system. His theories of ‘habitus’ and forms of capital are commonly used, especially when researchers explore how social groups are able to maintain a privileged position through their accumulation of cultural and social capital, or when analysing the ideological constructs that give rise to the social experiences that contribute to identity formation. Bourdieu describes how capital is invested in the family so that subsequent generations may use capital to their advantage in maintaining a privileged position in society. For example, wealthy parents are able to send their children to the ‘best’ schools in order to accumulate cultural capital in the form of academic qualifications, which universities will accept as fulfilling their entry requirements; underprivileged members of society find it more difficult to obtain such capital.

Where researchers are critical of the use of habitus, it tends to centre on the lack of quantitative data that can be produced (Vryonides 2007), or on arguments that habitus is deterministic in nature (Reay 2004). I will argue for a qualitative approach constructed around Bourdieu's concepts of cultural and social capital, and for the appropriateness of such an approach for illuminating the complex nature of pupils' decision making within the parameters of their social/family background and school context.

Other researchers, such as Coleman (1988), make use of the concept of social capital, but this body of work refers to capital generated through social networks (within neighbourhoods, families, voluntary activities and associations) where common understanding is built up and shared. In this research I am concerned with how individuals compete with one another in the field of education to acquire more or higher-valued qualifications and positions. Social and cultural capital as understood here reflect power relations and positions, and therefore Bourdieu's analysis is more helpful.

Chapter two continues with a discussion of recent research in two separate contexts: I consider current research in the field of pupil choice, reviewing work which has examined how pupils make choices in their educational lives; and go on to consider research which makes use of Bourdieu's concepts of capital and habitus.

Research into choice ranges from the basic subject choices (for example between History and Geography), to the more far-reaching choices of whether and where to attend a Higher Education Institution. These research reports and articles make use of a variety of methodologies, not necessarily relating to habitus or capital, and so I additionally carry out a review of research which links directly to these themes.

One of the outcomes of the discussion is a section covering the operationalisation of habitus as a research tool.

From the time of the 1944 Education Act until this project started in 2006, many changes have taken place in the education system, yet working-class children still lag behind middle-class children in terms of successful outcomes. It is therefore relevant to chart the changes to the political climate throughout those 60 years as Labour and Conservative governments alternated, increasingly vying with each other to prove to the electorate that they cared more about the education system. The debate over the introduction of Comprehensive Schools was still continuing in the 1980s (Moore 2004) at the beginning of my teaching career, and Conservative politicians at that time, though not exclusively opposed to Comprehensive Schools, saw the quality agenda as the route to ensuring that the education outcomes provided by them matched the outcomes of selective schools.

As a consequence, the Conservative Government of the 1980s began a series of reforms which ultimately generated the inception of league tables as a mechanism for measuring quality, and schools were expected to compete in the market place – with the assumption being that schools which did not perform well in the tables would not be chosen by parents, and would thus be forced to close (Ball, 2003).

The final part of the literature review, in chapter three, therefore explores the policy context, in which I trace the development of government policy from the 1944 Education Act until the start of the project in 2006. I describe how policy developments have led to the existence of a ‘quasi-market’ culture, in which schools are required to market themselves as if they were marketing a product, and where the parents and children, as ‘customers’, will choose the most attractive option available to them. I discuss the strategies adopted by schools to maximise their position relative to their

rival institutions. I contend that these strategies are designed with a mechanistic view of target-setting, and that the best interests of the pupils are not necessarily met. Documentary evidence from the research project will be used to examine how targets are set for individual pupils, and thus how the pupils are able to respond to these targets.

1.6 Empirical Considerations

The methodology and the justification for the selected research design and methods are presented in chapter four. A study such as this can be conducted in a variety of ways – quantitative, qualitative; short-term or longitudinal. My interest is chiefly in the mechanism of how an individual's family background contributes to the shaping of their personal outlook on education and career, and therefore an in-depth study of a relatively small cohort is appropriate. Because decision-making begins to devolve to the individual at this stage, the age range of around 14-16 is of interest and well within the timescale available for doctoral study. I selected a single school to conduct the research in order to reduce the number of variables in the social field under study. There was also no intention to carry out a comparative study, which would have necessitated the collection of data from a wider catchment area. The selected school had at the time recently become a Technology College, and was also a Roman Catholic faith school for which the intake covered a wide demographic area – it was not limited to one small area of the town.

The cohort was selected from the middle ability-band of the school on the grounds that this would contain pupils with a range of aspirations, some of whom were likely to have aspirations towards a course in Higher Education, and some of whom were not likely.

The cohort studied is relatively small because I do not attempt to draw generalised conclusions – the conclusions are centred on how the methodology can shed

light on an important area of research, and how influences caused by educational policy can be identified through this analysis. Recommendations for action are centred on the nature of pupil aspirations, and how these can be nurtured and encouraged.

The methodology draws on a body of research with young people, and takes note of recent developments in research issues relating to children: for example the Children Act of 2004, which enshrined children's rights of consultation in such matters. Greig et al. (2013, 63) point out the need to consider carefully whether research is "... 'on', 'with', 'about', and even 'alongside' children..." At one end, researching 'on' children presents a position which implies the denial of any involvement of the pupils in the development or conduct of the research, and at the other end, researching 'alongside' children implies a set of common goals for the research, which in this case would hinder attempts at interpretive analysis.

I therefore wanted to develop an approach which gave some opportunity for the participants' involvement in decision making, and opportunity to share some of the outcomes, but also allowed me to determine the direction and context of the research.

Most of the data collected are from the participants themselves: eighteen pupils from the middle band of year nine who were willing to participate in the study. I then divided them into six groups for the purpose of organising focus groups. The choice of group interviews rather than individual interviews was designed to encourage participant voice. Morgan (1988) suggests that the presence of their peers helps young participants to feel that their opinion is shared and valid, whereas if interviewed alone they might prove more reluctant to speak. These interviews were conducted in three stages: early in year nine, before the options selection process had begun, and therefore before any real choices had been made; late in year nine when the options had been chosen; and finally two years later with the same participants after they had had an

opportunity both to review their decision and to look forwards to the next stage of their education.

After transcription of the interviews, I assembled the data into individual units which I refer to as ‘codes’, and further built these into ‘themes’, through which emerged the major topics of interest at this time of the children’s lives. The data from the group interviews was supplemented by interviews with key members of staff involved in the teaching, setting and counselling of pupils. These interviews were useful in providing background information, some of which emerged as crucially important in the data analysis.

1.7 The Study Findings

The findings are discussed in chapters five to eight. Chapter five deals with background information concerning the schools and the participants, while chapters six, seven, and eight deal with the three research questions in turn. All four chapters record the small incremental steps taken by individuals as they progress, each contributing to the educational trajectory of the pupils. These incremental steps are the results of responses to social interactions, whether they be between the pupils and their peers, or between the pupils and the institution. It takes concerted action from an individual to change the direction in which these steps will tend to point them.

In chapter six, I explore how the participants’ individual habitus has a bearing on the way in which they viewed their position in future education and careers. While they were able to visualise their progression into these fields, they were to a certain extent constrained by the experience they had gained within the family, and this tended to limit their expectations. One of the participants however, did demonstrate that social and cultural capital are seen as ‘commodities’ which can be accumulated once a need has been identified. As a result of her efforts to gain appropriate experiences to enable

her to gain access to a medical degree, it was possible to observe how transformations of habitus can be generated through agency.

Chapter seven demonstrates how the participants view issues such as class and gender, and how their world-view is affected by their class background. Most noticeable here was the effect, described by Skeggs (1997) of ‘disidentification’, whereby they tended to identify themselves by the class they did not belong to rather than the one they did.

Chapter eight presents and discusses the way the school makes use of data processed by the Fischer Family Trust in setting individual performance and attainment targets for pupils. It became clear that these targets were set for the purpose of positioning the school at a desired level in the national league tables, and not for the benefit of the pupils themselves. Some pupils, according to the interview data, have a background which suggests they have an educational disadvantage relative to their peers – a conclusion which is supported when performance at key stage two is studied. But the targets set by the calculations of the Fischer Family Trust do not take this into account, and these targets appear to arise from an assumption that any shortfall in key stage two performance will be made good by the end of key stage four. However, studies such as Strand (2007), based on nationally gathered data, show that attainment has already been affected by this stage, and that pupils who are lagging behind at key stage two are likely to continue this trend (see also Gazeley 2009).

1.8 Conclusions

Chapter nine draws together the conclusions from the three data-analysis chapters and discusses the findings from the two perspectives of the participants and the school. I observe the incremental nature of transformative steps as habitus develops and draw attention to the different incidents and actions which lead to these steps. Of

particular interest are (a) the process of ‘legitimation’, whereby members of the dominant group decide whether to admit one of their peers, and (b) the transformations in habitus attempted by one participant who, recognising a gap in her social and cultural capital, and took active steps to invest in the type of symbolic capital that could improve her chances for entry into the medical profession.

The school perspective demonstrates how the school’s efforts to transform and develop the pupils’ capital are strongly influenced by the use of data analysis supplied by the Fischer Family Trust. I examine the mechanism by which this analysis leads to target-setting, a process that is disconnected from the original intention of the Trust. Individual targets are not, as one might expect, based on individual pupils’ ability to achieve, but on the school’s need to fulfil targets of their own which seek to improve the school’s position in national league tables.

The chapter concludes with a review of the methodology employed in this study, and calls for more research into the nature of target setting, and into the mechanisms by which individual incremental acts can be identified and acted upon in order to transform the habitus of individual pupils.

Chapter two

Theoretical perspectives

2.1 Introduction

In a thesis which so closely follows the work of Bourdieu, it is important to gain a clear understanding first of his work in general, and second of his work in an educational context. Many commentators have used the concepts of habitus and cultural capital in research in the UK, and many have described the nature of Bourdieu's concepts. The aim of this chapter is twofold: firstly, to gain a theoretical understanding of habitus and forms of capital, and secondly to comment on how the concepts are used in UK research. In reviewing the research, it has to be noted that not all research into pupil choice uses these concepts, and some which do not use them are reviewed in addition. The issue of gender equality also necessarily arises, partly through issues raised by a number of feminist researchers in the field, but also because of comments relating to gender issues Bourdieu himself made in response to critiques of his work.

Pierre Bourdieu wrote prolifically in many fields, particularly in the areas of cultural and social inequalities, and his work on inequalities in the French education system have been used extensively by many researchers. In particular he was concerned with the way privileged individuals developed the structures within society which helped to maintain their positions of privilege. This ability of the privileged sections of society to impose their own symbolic and cultural productions on others enabled them to maintain social and cultural power. He saw the interplay of these productions as a form of 'game' in which the rules, though never explicitly expressed, were implicitly understood and obeyed by the social actors through their dispositions. These dispositions are encapsulated by the term 'habitus'.

According to Grenfell (2008), Bourdieu was critical both of postmodernism and, to a certain extent, the kind of quantitative studies which linked people's actions to economically-based rational choices. He argued that it was not merely economic capital (or the lack of it) which maintained the structures of society. Since this thesis offers neither postmodern nor a quantitative approach, I describe the reasoning given by Bourdieu himself and apply this reasoning to the circumstances in this study.

The concept of habitus and the description of forms of capital underpinned much of Bourdieu's work (in the Arts, Economics and many other fields) in describing how privilege was reproduced from generation to generation. He was applying the concepts to the situation in France in the twentieth century, but researchers in the UK and elsewhere have made use of the ideas and adapted them to analyses in this country and in others.

This discussion is then followed by an account of research in the field of educational choice, some of which make use of capital and/or habitus. They are reviewed with the aim of developing an understanding of a methodology and a data analysis which will provide new insights in the field of educational inequality. In particular these insights are in that aspect of educational inequality which sees a persistent imbalance in the achievements and aspirations between middle-class and working-class school students.

2.2 Forms of capital

In a paper entitled *The Forms of Capital* published in 1983, Bourdieu himself described three forms of capital possessed by individuals and used by them to obtain privilege and favours in society: cultural, social and economic. He added a fourth: symbolic, to account for the different values placed on the other forms of capital by dominant social groups. In my data analysis, I refer extensively to these forms of

capital. The easiest to deal with is economic capital, for he uses it in the monetary sense, in that it can be accumulated as wealth. But economic capital can also be tied into an institutionalised form (property, education degrees, etc.) or be converted to social and cultural capital. It stands to reason therefore, that those in possession of a large quantity of economic capital are in a strong position to accumulate social and cultural capital. But conversely, social and cultural capital can also be used in the accumulation of economic capital because it can enable access to better conditions of employment.

Bourdieu (2004: 17) described cultural capital as existing in three states:

“... the *embodied* state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the *objectified* state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.)...; and in the *institutionalized* state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because ... in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee.”

Capital in the embodied state is observed through the way people act and respond to social situations, in the objectified state through the collection of artefacts, and significantly for this thesis, in the institutionalised state through the accumulation of formal educational qualifications. Bourdieu emphasises the element of time – embodied cultural capital is developed through an investment over a significant period of time; such capital cannot be accumulated simply by conversion from other forms. It requires investment, particularly by the family, but can also be accumulated by personal acquisition (self-improvement). Institutionalised capital also requires a considerable amount of time to accumulate. For example in the normal course of events, students leaving compulsory education will have completed up to fourteen years in school, with a variety of qualifications at a range of levels. Most importantly in the context of this

thesis, those who have invested most heavily will have certificates which enable them to enter institutions of Higher Education. But even amongst those fortunate enough to accumulate large quantities of this cultural capital, there will be some whose capital lacks symbolic value, and these individuals will therefore be able to enter only those institutions which have lower status. Dominant groups in society are able to raise the status of certain institutions by ensuring that entry to these institutions requires capital which carries a higher symbolic value. Since the working-classes have less access to this symbolically more valued capital, it follows that the proportion of entrants to such institutions from the working-classes is lower, even when the individuals involved have the intellectual capacity required.

Social capital is described by Bourdieu (2004:21) as

“... the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group...”

It follows that individuals are able to accumulate social capital through a network of connections which provide access to further resources of cultural and social capital. The extent of these networks indicates the ability of the individual to mobilise these resources and, as with cultural capital, require an investment of time and effort to maintain and utilise.

The terms ‘Cultural Capital’ and ‘Social Capital’ were not used exclusively by Bourdieu, and have endured since they were first used in the twentieth century because they carry an association with economics which implies that they are commodities capable of accumulation. Edwards, Franklin and Holland (2003) and Vryonides (2007) explore the use of capital in educational and sociological research, and both refer to

Coleman and Bourdieu as two principal theorists who link the accumulation of capital to the family. While Bourdieu sees capital as accumulated within the family for the purpose of maintaining privilege and status, Coleman (1988) is also concerned with the use of social capital as a mechanism for ensuring social obligations can be transferred and met. As such, it extends beyond the family into the relationships in the community and enables members of a community to co-operate in an atmosphere of trust. In this context, Edwards, Franklin and Holland (2003) describe how Coleman sees that social capital can be destroyed when families move from community to community because of the loss of links between families and the community. By contrast, they describe how Bourdieu sees the accumulation of capital as a strategic action carried out by families on behalf of their offspring. In this sense, Bourdieu's use of the concept of social capital suggests power relationships built around social networks and affiliations, a dimension that is not present in Coleman's definition. In addition, from Bourdieu's perspective a family which moves between communities may well be doing so as an investment of social or cultural capital, and in such a case, that capital will be enhanced and not destroyed.

Much recent work in the United Kingdom has built on Bourdieu's concepts of social, cultural and symbolic capital, and so it is useful at this point to review the interpretations of capital as described by other writers

Skeggs (1997:8), drawing on the work of Bourdieu, provides a clear and helpful summary of the forms of capital:

- "Economic capital, i.e. capital in its monetary form;
- Cultural capital, which shows itself in a number of ways and can be formally represented by qualifications, but also by features such as competence with language or self-confidence in challenging situations;

- Social capital, which refers to a person's membership of privileged and influential social groups;
- Symbolic capital: none of the forms of capital are any use if they are not accepted, or legitimated by particular groups who are able to exert power.”

Symbolic capital is capital that has status and value conferred to it by dominant members of society. These are the people who for example control access to employment or to Higher Education by ‘legitimizing’ certain forms of capital in preference to other, possibly intrinsically equal, forms. In describing the other three forms of capital, it is interesting to look at examples of how they gain (or lose) symbolic value.

In this context, cultural capital is in two forms: the qualifications which people gain as they progress through life; and equally importantly the knowledge they gain which helps them to negotiate their way through society. According to Reay, David and Ball (2005:20), cultural capital “...encompasses a broad array of linguistic competences, manners, preferences and orientations... [which] can be glimpsed in the narratives of young people from established middle-class families”. Some qualifications carry more status than others – not just in the obvious sense that a Master’s degree is at a higher level than a Bachelor degree, but in the sense that some courses and some universities hold a different value in the employment market. So for example, in the UK some universities will require candidates for entry to have A-levels in the ‘traditional’ subjects such as History, Physics, Mathematics and so on, and will shun subjects such as Media Studies.

People with social and cultural capital that has high value as symbolic capital are in a good position to help their children negotiate their way through society and gain easier access to rewards gained by successful engagement with the education system.

In the UK, affluent parents are able to purchase a house in a 'good' neighbourhood which ensures a place for their child at a favoured school (Woods, 2002).

Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe (1995), in studying parental choice of secondary school, identify 'privileged choosers', who are able to make use of information gained through their social networks to better the educational opportunities of their children. If for some reason their child is not allocated a place at the school, these privileged choosers are able to lobby the Local Authority and present a case, and they are often successful. Privileged choosers will constantly intervene throughout their child's education in order to ensure that they are taught by the best teachers, and are placed in the best classes; they will try to make sure their child takes a course that has academic status and therefore ensure what they see as the best opportunities. Such a strategy is successful because it usually leads students to courses of study that ensure the possession of high-level qualifications, and is underlined by a clear understanding of the system and how it operates. Bourdieu argued that this was the mechanism by which the middle-classes maintained their position in society and prevented the working-classes from progressing (Robbins, 1997).

The different forms of capital can be invested by parents in the family for use in future generations, and as with financial capital, those with significant social and cultural capital to invest are able to do so and provide their children with an advantage in their education. The education system is familiar to the parents and they are able to manipulate the situation to maximise the potential outcomes, particularly when financial capital is added to enable attendance at non-state schools. This investment of capital is evident in a variety of situations: parents will move to live within the catchment area of schools they believe will be best for their children; they will monitor the education of their children closely, intervening strongly when they believe the school is not operating

effectively; and they will ensure their children take the ‘right’ subjects before moving on to university.

Conversely, those without significant levels of social and cultural capital to invest are often living in socially deprived areas because they lack the funds to move out, and are unaware of the ways in which to intervene in the education of their children. Thus the effect of social capital is seen through its application: level of social capital is seen through an individual’s ability to make use of it.

Cultural capital has been treated somewhat differently, and a number of studies have used such indicators as reading habits and attendance at cultural events (for example, museums and art galleries). A number of devices are used as a way of categorising or measuring cultural capital, for example the educational level of parents, or the number of books possessed by a household have been used as proxy indicators of cultural capital. As Vryonides (2007: 871) puts it:

“Halsey, Heath and Ridge (1980), like Bourdieu, used parental educational level as a proxy for cultural capital. In particular, they assumed that parental qualifications could be an indirect measure of the amount of cultural capital that is present in the home; the higher the academic qualifications, the more cultural capital is present.”

2.3 Bourdieu’s concepts of ‘habitus’ and ‘field’

Encompassing the various forms of capital is the concept of habitus. While the term ‘capital’ implies the possibility of the accumulation of wealth and its investment in the future, habitus refers to the dispositions exhibited by individuals and families. Reed-Danahay (2004:46) describes habitus as

“...an internalized, embodied disposition toward the world. It comes into being through inculcation in early childhood, which is not a process of

deliberate, formal teaching and learning but, rather, one associated with immersion in a particular sociocultural milieu, the family and household. Through observation and listening, the child internalizes “proper” ways of looking at the world, ways of moving (bodily habits), and ways of acting. Children, thus, acquire the “cultural capital” associated with their habitus.”

She further describes how the primary habitus developed within the family will come into contact with an outside institution such as a school. Here, members of the family adopt a secondary ‘cultivated habitus’ in which particular expertise, opinions, language, and behaviours are valued and rewarded above others. Those for whom these are familiar are therefore at an advantage and more able to progress within the institution. Unlike the various forms of capital, which can be invested, exchanged, and used in negotiation, habitus is a concept which, according to Bourdieu, operates beneath the conscious.

Willis (1977) saw this as a weakness of the concept – he argued that individuals could and did actively construct their position in society – although he accepted that habitus is useful in describing how the middle-classes are able to pass on their privilege to the next generation. The ‘lads’ he studied had a clear idea of their position in society and actively rebelled against the authority it represented. However, this rebellion did not remove them from their educational suppression, it merely took away their passivity. So, contrary to Bourdieu’s assumptions, Willis’ ‘lads’ operate quite consciously in withdrawing their engagement with and participation in school, which of course at the same time, contributes to their educational failure, and subsequently confirms them in a socially and culturally inferior position. These are processes which Bourdieu and Passeron, quoted in Reed-Danahay (2004: 46) describe as

‘...transmission from one generation to the other of the culture inherited from the past’. They distinguish social reproduction as ‘reproduction of the structure of the relations of force between classes’.

In spite of the analysis above, Bourdieu recognised that agency, and changes in social status, were possible, but as Reed-Danahay (2004: 56) describes, these are exceptions:

In *The State Nobility*, Bourdieu addressed cases in which there were individual ‘misfirings’ of the system of ‘social reproduction’ which he also called ‘deviant trajectories’. This is where there would be deviation between position and disposition, where a bourgeois child may fall in social status, or a working-class child may rise in social status. These were, however, exceptions, and as one can see from the language Bourdieu employs to describe this, exceptions to what he believed was most often a smooth process in which social agents were inculcated with the right dispositions to fit their positions in society.

Willis (1977) had a different explanation for the ‘lads’ he observed who chose to reject any opportunities for investment of social or cultural capital and thus to advance in conventional terms through education. Rather than arguing that these boys were in a sense colluding in their own suppression and domination, Willis suggests that rebellion was the motivation for the boys’ action. Yet a Bourdieuan analysis of the boys’ behaviour would suggest that their low levels of cultural and social capital led to an alienation from the dominating group, (the dominating group being represented first by their teachers and later by their employers) and thence to the rebellion against it.

Their actions, while they were not directed towards any particular outcome, nevertheless suggest the presence of habitus, which Bourdieu (1990: 53) describes as

“...systems of durable, transposable dispositions ...that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them”

Reay (2004), in describing the concept of habitus, implies that youngsters’ habitus is evident in their behaviour – and that they are conscious of a set of learned behaviours that infer membership of their own cultural and social group. In an earlier work, Reay (1995b) described embodiment as one of the crucial features of habitus, and that ways of talking, moving, standing and behaving are all durably expressed by individuals. Additionally, she points out that this results in a degree of ambiguity and looseness which conversely acts as a strength of the concept since it allows researchers to deal with the uncertainties and ambiguities that exist in the real world. She continues to describe how habitus ‘is continuously modified by individuals’ encounters with the outside world’ (Reay, 1995b: 119), and therefore groups with similar dispositions are likely to become aligned with one another, adopting similar attitudes and patterns of behaviour. Thus, the effect of habitus to reinforce membership of a social and cultural group may well inhibit the investment of cultural capital in the individual which would otherwise pave the way for his or her educational success.

“The dispositions (capacities, tendencies, propensities or inclinations) that constitute the habitus are acquired through a gradual process of inculcation; making the habitus a complex amalgam of past and present.” (Mills 2008: 80) So these dispositions can and do change subtly as pupils progress through their education, but at age 14 they may be faced with a conflict between their disposition to select one educational trajectory and the advice of the school to select another. Those who opt for a more academic trajectory may be making a conscious decision to invest in forms of cultural

capital which are more valued by the dominant group in society and can be faced with changes to their habitus over time which alienate them from their fellows.

However, effecting a significant transformation of habitus is not simple. First, curriculum choices are not without limitations – very often courses open to the individual are fixed by the school's perception of what is 'best' for the individual. Thus low-achievers will be directed towards vocational-type courses, and the high achievers will be encouraged in the opposite direction – the poor esteem in which vocational courses are held acts as a barrier to their adoption.

Second, and linked to the above, many families displaying a high level of cultural capital will seek to influence their children to take a course of action which may lead to the acquisition of further capital – in this case in the form of higher-level qualifications (and these qualifications will tend to be sought in the 'preferred' subjects – traditional academic subjects which carry more cultural capital).

Third, schools in the current political and economic climate are under pressure to continuously improve outcomes as measured by their position in league tables, and in turn, their position in league tables is principally dependent upon performance in a narrow range of subjects (English, Mathematics and Science are seen as particularly important). Therefore schools are constrained to work towards a curriculum which maximises outcomes in the subjects which bring the greatest benefit to their status relative to other schools of similar type, or to other schools with which they are competing for intake of pupils.

Add to this the well-documented effect (e.g. Strand 2007) of socioeconomic status on the educational outcomes of young people, and there is precious little left for them to decide, and therefore little they can do to develop and extend their levels of capital.

The participants in this research project were selected because of their classification as having the ‘potential’ to progress their education to University degree level. The term ‘potential’ here is a construct, and a highly subjective one. In this sense, the perception of potential is an assumption (by the school teachers, and by myself as a researcher) based upon the student’s position in the middle-ability band of the school – and that in turn is based on an assumption that roughly half of the particular school population usually qualifies for a place in Higher Education. There are a number of measures which educationalists use to discern this potential, and significant among them is the ability to achieve high marks in assessment tests – particularly the formal national testing in the form of GCSE and A-level assessments. In fact it could be argued that the GCSE exam is the most important of all, since admissions departments at universities and colleges have only the GCSE results of an applicant at their disposal when they are judging a candidate for entry. A prediction of expected A-level results is made from the quality of the GCSE results, and from statements made on behalf of the candidate by the school. Such statements talk of the ‘potential’ of the candidate in subjective terms, and refer to the ability of the candidate to undertake programmes of study. Here, the term ‘potential’ moves away from an objective consideration of achievement towards the subjective ideas of ‘disposition’, or ‘tendency to act’, as described by Bourdieu in his definition of habitus.

If a child demonstrates certain dispositions which teachers recognise as displaying the potential for success in education, then the child is more likely to succeed, and this recognition is likely to go beyond mere performance in tests – conforming behaviours are also likely to increase teachers’ confidence in their potential. But studying at university involves a range of skills, including those required to process

abstract ideas. Nash (2005) develops the concept of ‘cognitive habitus’ to describe dispositions to act in ways which we might otherwise describe as ‘intelligence’.

He describes a long tradition of linking measures of intelligence (particularly IQ) directly to educational outcomes, and he argues that such measures are not helpful in dealing with issues of inequality and injustice because they provide insufficient information about tendencies to act, and the skills required to undertake a degree cannot be inferred directly from performance in IQ tests.

This has a direct bearing on the methodology for this research, since the selection of participants will inevitably rely on measures conducted by the school because of the way the pupils are grouped together by abilities in certain subjects and thus by their success or otherwise in various tests which are designed to measure ability. However, ‘ability’ tends to be confused with ‘successful performance in examinations’.

“Research concerned with cognitive habitus is more likely to be located within the socio-linguistic tradition ... than associated with a concept of intelligence inextricably linked to test and measurement technology. And should it be the case that empirical research provides sound evidence that structural relations, including those that control the distribution and application of organized knowledge ... are implicated in the development of cognitive habitus in such a way that certain identifiable intellectual skills are developed differentially in social classes, then the theoretical and practical implication of that for education must be confronted.” (Nash, 2005:18)

Thus habitus is revealed in the practices and actions of the participants, and it is therefore best studied through the language used to describe these practices and actions. Naidoo (2004) adds to this Bourdieu’s concept of field – the structured arena within which actors take positions of domination or subordination. Power is exercised by the

dominant over the subordinate by their possession of cultural and social resources specific to that field. He suggests (p 458) the term ‘academic capital’ for these resources as they are a blend of social and cultural capital, and in order to achieve a position which is viewed by the establishment as a disposition to be academic, the individual must use a strategy involving (p 458) a ‘specific orientation of practice’.

The concept of field is of significant importance and merits discussion at length. The translation from the French word *champ* needs some explanation – it is used more in the context of ‘theatre of engagement’ than simply an area of land. Bourdieu himself recognised the value of using analogies between social field and other forms of field, as Thompson (2008: 68) explains:

There are many analogies for Bourdieu’s *le champ*: the field on which a game of football is played...; the [force] field in science fiction...; or even a field of forces in Physics. Bourdieu’s concept of *le champ*, or *field*, contains important elements of all of these three analogies, while equating to none of them.

Thus a football field is marked by a well-defined boundary and is governed by a system of rules which are regulated by officials with specific roles. Social fields are similarly bounded, though Bourdieu recognised that unlike the boundaries on a football field, social boundaries are fuzzy and ill-defined. Nevertheless, he saw human activity within the social field as a competitive game with rewards for the successful. Again however, unlike the carefully prepared surface of a football field, the social field is not level, and participants’ knowledge of and understanding of the rules is unequal – players start with differing levels of capital and can use this benefit to accrue more and thus gain further advantage.

For this reason,

“Bourdieu argued for a methodology that would bring together an inter-dependent and co-constructed trio – *field, capital and habitus* – with none of them primary, dominant or causal.”

Thompson (2008: 69)

Because there are many different social fields, there are many systems of rules with their own unique histories, personalities and traditions. There are also many different fields in the sporting and scientific senses. Grenfell and James (2004) refer repeatedly to ‘forces’ acting within and upon educational fields, and Bourdieu used the analogy of force fields as well, both in the science-fiction sense that they provide a tangible protective boundary, and in the scientific sense that they provide a region in space within which forces act according to a series of precise mathematical rules. In the latter case, the boundaries are not discrete because they normally diminish with distance from the centre, and there can exist conflicting forces from different fields.

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 104-5), cited in Thompson (2008), proposed three steps for investigating a social field:

1. Analyse the positions of the field *vis-à-vis* the field of power;
2. Map out the objective structures of relations between the positions occupied by the social agents or institutions who compete for the legitimate forms of specific authority of which this field is a site;
3. Analyse the habitus of social agents, the different dispositions they have acquired by internalizing a determinate type of social and economic condition, and which find a definite trajectory within the field ... a more or less favourable opportunity to become actualized.

The first two steps are the subject of chapters two and three of this thesis, and the final step espouses the rationale for the data collection and analysis in the following

chapters. The ‘positions occupied by the social agents or institutions’ refer to the practices of the teachers and the school involved in the investigation as they provide the curriculum organisation under the constraints and controls described in chapter three.

2.4 Considerations of Gender

This section considers how the literature views differently the achievements and aspirations of girls in education as compared to those of boys.

Much of the literature I have discussed already points to differences in achievements between different social groups, and so far this has been mainly related to social class. So, in this section I am concerned with three additional and interconnected dimensions that relate to the school achievement debate: comparison of achievement rates for boys and girls; the different educational fields encountered by boys and girls; and the linking of class and gender in Bourdieu’s perspective.

There is a considerable body of research which demonstrates that girls’ achievements in education have overtaken those of boys in the latter part of the twentieth century. This has been seen as a problem of boys’ underachievement rather than as the success for girls’ achievement. Much analysis has therefore been undertaken which seeks to address this ‘imbalance’, even though as Francis (2010) points out, a great deal of educational policy effort has been expended in addressing perceived notions of learning styles which differ between the genders, or of innate sex differences which require different approaches in order to achieve effective teaching. However, research points to evidence that young people’s gendered perceptions of their environment, and their consequent adopted behaviour strategies for dealing with their environment, is a significant factor here. Some of these behaviour strategies are more or less conducive to effective learning, and therefore it is the adopted strategies which significantly influence the educational outcomes.

To put this into context, Francis (2010) presents an interesting analysis of current data relating to achievement at GCSE in England. The original data is taken from the current government statistics on achievement, and use free school meals (FSM) as a proxy indicator for relative poverty, or indicatively, social class. Table 2.1 shows the percentage of boys and girls ‘passing’ five or more subjects at GCSE in the different categories relating to free school meals.

Table 2.1			
Achievements at key stage four for GCSE qualifications in 2006, by FSM and gender			
	% achieving 5 or more A*-C		
	Boys	Girls	Total
FSM	28.7	37.4	33.0
Non-FSM	56.2	66.0	61.0
Unclassified	42.3	47.7	44.8
All pupils	52.6	62.2	57.3

Source: Francis (2010: 23)

Reading across the rows of Table 2.1, it appears that girls are achieving up to 10 percentage points better than boys, and indeed the final row summarises this. However, as Francis (2010) points out, further study of the table reveals that non-FSM boys (56.2%) are achieving far better than FSM girls (37.4%) – a difference of nearly 20 percentage points. In other words, the social deprivation indicated by eligibility for free school meals is a far more potent predictor of educational outcomes than gender, yet it is gender which seems to attract policy attention, and interestingly this policy attention tends to focus on the deficit performance that boys seem to produce.

Dillabough (2006) summarises the development of gender-related studies in the twentieth century, and finds that early studies were characterised by a search for intrinsic differences between the genders which would explain gaps in attainment. Solutions therefore failed to address the underlying social construction of the inequality which existed in the first place – in other words, schools remained locations where the patriarchal structure of society remained in place, thus enabling the reproduction of social inequality.

Bourdieu (2006) recognised the significance of this, and noted that the patriarchal structure of society was inevitably at the heart of this cultural reproduction and the resulting inequities in outcomes for women and men. However, he also welcomed the contributions of feminist research which sought to address the inequities, commenting that (p. 93) ‘masculine domination no longer imposes itself with the transparency of something taken for granted.’ He observes the significant transformations in the position of women, for example their increased access to secondary and Higher Education, and greater representation in some of the higher-earning professional occupations, including positions of authority. He puts this down to a transformation away from the emphasis on child-rearing, marriage and house work and towards greater economic independence. However, he also acknowledges (p. 94) that the ‘inertia of habitus, and of law’ serves to maintain the dominant structure, and that the improvements described above are more accessible to middle-class than working-class girls.

An example of this can be seen in media descriptions of girls and boys in education. There is a popular view of working-class boys that their ‘laddishness’, typified by hedonistic behaviour involving alcohol and unsocial behaviour, is exclusively working-class in origin, and that it is directly related to under-achievement

and lowered aspiration in the educational field. However, Archer, Hollingworth and Mendick (2010), studying boys in an urban setting, go some way towards identifying the underlying reasons for this form of cultural reproduction. They discovered that the laddish behaviour was often used to disguise the fact that the boys did school work ‘under cover’ or in secret, and that the behaviour is more an attempt to fit in with their peers than an effort to reject their education. In addition, they point out that laddish behaviour is not restricted to working-class boys, and that it is exhibited by middle-class boys, and girls as well. But where boys are expected to behave laddishly, they experience pressure to adopt an anti-education attitude, partly because the educational field has been described by many observers as a feminised, middle-class environment. A summary of contributions to this argument is provided by Archer, Hollingworth and Mendick (2010), and it is also discussed by Arnot and Mac an Ghaill (2006).

Thus Archer, Hollingworth and Mendick (2010), three decades after the classic study of Willis (1977), observed the differing attitudes to the education of girls and boys in an urban school. In that study, working-class boys who expressed anti-educational feelings tended to look at the practical, hands-on aspects of their aspirations, preferring physical activity, and viewing education as desk-bound and passive. This is not to say that all or most boys had no educational aspirations – there was a group in the study which had the intention of continuing their education, but used terms such as ‘training’ and ‘apprenticeship’ when referring to their future goals. They viewed post-compulsory education as an easier option than manual work. However, many found that their aspirations for entering work at the age of 16 were confounded by the prevailing economic situation and the lack of jobs, and later returned to the education system. The girls in the study were characterised by a degree of disengagement with schooling, and/or engagement with glamour and the emphasis on heterosexual forms of femininity

around appearance, romance and motherhood. This resulted in a comparative reluctance to continue in education when compared with middle-class girls.

In view of the picture emerging in relation to gender and achievement, both in terms of recent achievement rates as published by the government, and in terms of the empirical findings from research on gender and education, this thesis approaches 'gender' as a social construct which is subject to the same kind of analysis as that of social class. Thus habitus, and social and cultural capital, are seen to be constituted not only by the experiences and outlooks that come from within particular class groups, but also from the discourses that are constructing gender expectations and aspirations for class sub-groups and individuals. Gender and social class, are therefore, subject to transformation and reproduction in similar ways. Indeed, gendered capital is regarded by many (for example O'Brien 2008, Healy, Haynes and Hampshire 2007) as a form of social capital. Feminist literature has much to say about the interpretation of people's experience in a society constructed largely from a patriarchal perspective. Letherby (2003, 4) describes how feminism, while not a single methodology as such, is distinguished by the fact that "all feminists are concerned with understanding why inequality between women and men exists".

So far in this chapter I have considered the theoretical background to research in this field. I now move on to a consideration of the application of this theory to research into student choice.

2.5 Considerations of Class

There are many interpretations of class, and social classifications have developed steadily over the last century since the Registrar General first introduced a class scheme for the 1911 census. This was in use until 1998 when it was replaced by the NS-SEC (National statistics, Socio-Economic Classification):

1. Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations
 - 1.1 Large employers and higher managerial and administrative occupations
 - 1.2 Higher professional occupations
2. Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations
3. Intermediate occupations
4. Small employers and own account workers
5. Lower supervisory and technical occupations
6. Semi-routine occupations
7. Routine occupations
8. Never worked and long-term unemployed

NS-SCE contains more categories than the pre-1998 scheme, and takes account of occupations and management structures that didn't exist in 1911. According to Roberts (2011), Marxists argue for a scheme which distinguishes workers from employers, and to an extent that dichotomy can be seen in this classification. But the classification is more complex than that because it takes accounts of benefits such as job security and career expectations rather than simply economic considerations.

Many researchers use subsets of the classifications, and Roberts (2011) collapses the scheme into four categories: Middle (1 & 2), Intermediate (3-5), Working (6 & 7), and Underclass (8). This can be useful in small-scale research, and in research which is limited to one or other of the classes (such as Archer and Yamashita, 2003, who point out the difficulties in defining and operationalising the concept of 'class'). Reay et al. (2005), using the pre-1998 scheme divide their respondents into middle-class and working-class families, placing the divide on the old scheme between 3N (non-manual) and 3M (manual). Their criteria were based on occupation, but where there was doubt

or ambiguity the researchers sought more detailed information about housing and actual occupation of parent (rather than the category of the occupation).

In this small-scale project it is helpful to reduce the classifications. The research was undertaken in a relatively prosperous semi-rural area with no heavy industry and where a significant proportion of the population are engaged in service industries. Roberts' (2011) sub-divisions will therefore be of most use.

A number of researchers have used the concept of habitus in their research (Nash 2005, Reay 1995a for example). They argue that the persistence of the gap in attainment whereby social groups III-V are under-represented in Higher Education when compared to social groups I and II indicates the relevance of habitus as a concept to explain the phenomenon. Nash (2005: 3) uses the term 'collective intelligence' to describe the ability of the middle-classes to use their knowledge of the educational system to the advantage of their offspring and enable the development of a 'cognitive habitus'. He argues that, rather than using the concept of 'personal intelligence', which refers to the ability of an individual to succeed in an examination, it is more meaningful to refer to 'collective intelligence', because the ability to succeed is borne not just of innate and cultivated ability, but of the range of practices which facilitate this success, such as the provision of facilities for study and the encouragement to study. Indeed this collective intelligence is applied to the design of the educational system to provide the middle-classes with education for their own children, rewarding behaviour which conforms to the codes and practices of the system. This 'cognitive habitus' is seen by many to be the key to unlocking the door to educational rewards.

Tooley and Darby (1998), in a paper commissioned by Ofsted to investigate the messages inherent in contemporary research, are critical of approaches which use habitus to explain the inequalities in the education system, on the grounds that much

educational research is politically charged. They apply a utilitarian discourse which focuses only on outcomes and results: the Government's education policies may be regarded as utilitarian because the key purpose of education is identified as needing to meet the pre-defined needs of the British economy (Jones and Thomas, 2005; Rooney and McKenna, 2005). Educational courses are framed as 'education for work' rather than 'education about work' and are primarily designed to develop individuals' competencies and the capacities of institutions to service the economy. Tooley and Darby (1998) appear to favour the finding out of 'what works and why' approach to research requested by David Blunkett when he was Education Minister, rather than a more considered and thoughtful approach to investigate the underlying causes of social injustice.

In response to Tooley and Darby's (1998) paper, Nash (1999) offered a useful summary of habitus and its use in educational research, adding a historical perspective on the use of habitus, tracing the concept all the way back to Aristotle, who understood that individuals could choose to act in certain ways only if they had the disposition and the opportunity to act that way in the first place. Nash refers to a number of philosophers through history who would all recognise that these dispositions to act are what characterises Bourdieu's theory. This would suggest that people respond to the structure of society in (somewhat) pre-determined ways without displaying completely free agency or will in their actions. But the Christian philosophers of the last two thousand years have all been concerned to stress that free will is an essential part of their theology. Therefore some mechanism exists which allows individuals to express free will and exhibit agency in the way they negotiate through the structure of society – for example how do we account for the working-class individuals who are able to develop trajectories away from their present position? For example, if a proportion of

children from a particular class successfully negotiate the educational system, then an enabling habitus must be present in their class culture¹. Bourdieu himself saw this as a possibility – that individuals offer a spectrum of characteristics and that within this spectrum there is the possibility for people to act with agency and modify their habitus. Critics argue that Bourdieu offers no account of how individuals brought up within the same class or family may adopt different practices, although it is precisely because Bourdieu *does* allow for agency that this can happen. In fact,

“According to Bourdieu, practices are generated by a certain habitus (this is a matter of definition) and, therefore, all practices give evidence of the structures of the habitus that generate them, and it follows that the methodological problem for a researcher working with the concept of habitus is to analyse social practices in such a way that the principles of the generative habitus are disclosed.”

(Nash, 1999: 178)

The phrase used here is ‘generated by’ and not ‘determined by’ – a crucial distinction. Nash goes on to describe how Bourdieu presented two models of reproduction – a statistical model which assumes a general ‘class habitus’ from which a proportion of working-class children succeed in the educational system, but without offering an explanation about why one particular individual is successful rather than another. The second model recognises a ‘specific habitus’ whereby individuals within a particular class group are able to exhibit variations in habitus.

Nash (1999) suggests that the first model is ill-conceived, but that it illustrates how objections arise. He goes on to suggest that a connection between agency and

¹ An alternative explanation is that in a buoyant economy, labour market conditions require more educated labour. Therefore the system ‘allows’ the increased recruitment into higher education. However, the argument still holds that this provides a mechanism for previously disadvantaged groups to progress. These groups can act as role models for others.

social classification can be achieved by reviewing the ‘specific habitus’ of groups in question and concludes that habitus is therefore a method in itself.

2.6 Operationalising Habitus as an analysis tool

According to Reay, David and Ball (2005, 19) “...Bourdieu explains school success by the amount and type of cultural capital inherited from the family milieu rather than by measures of individual talent or achievement”. Therefore at some stage of data analysis, it is necessary to investigate to what extent the participants’ family life has prepared them (either implicitly or explicitly) for the decisions they must take about their future education and career. It is vital to subsequent sections that I am able to use information about the students’ families to understand how their dispositions to act arise from their family backgrounds. Many education researchers (Nash 2005, Mills 2008, Grenfell and James 2004, Reay 2007, Archer, Halsall and Hollingworth 2007) point out that while Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is often rejected as deterministic, the concept does in fact offer an explanation of transformative potential. The way in which the individual uses their particular mix of cultural and social capital enables them to negotiate social situations. Those with forms of capital which match a new situation are better placed to respond positively to the demands of that situation. For example, Delpit (1997) describes how the use of mitigated speech can be incomprehensible to some youngsters – if a teacher warns them “is that the correct way to light a Bunsen burner?” it is a coded message that the pupil is doing something wrong – if the pupil is not familiar with this form of speech, the response is likely to be seen by the teacher as inappropriate and the pupil becomes labelled as uncooperative.

To this end, working from Mills (2008) and drawing on the researchers above, I have used a list of indicators which can be used to analyse the habitus displayed by the participants. It is based around forms of cultural and social capital – and where these

forms of capital are valued by those in positions of power, they will provide the pupils with advantage. Most often, these indicators will be grounded in their family life simply because that is the field in which they spend most of their time. The field of 'school' as a space they frequently occupy will have a strong influence here, since they have lived and acted in it for at least nine years by the time the interviews began. On the other hand, the field 'Higher Education' is a space which they can only imagine. Those participants with members of the family who have been to university will have gained some ideas from them and will be able to talk with greater knowledge and confidence about it, but nevertheless it remains an imagined space for them. They have not yet experienced the rules and constraints that university will present to them and must therefore use their experience of other fields to help them. They are most likely to refer to their experience of school to help them here.

The indicators are

- Beliefs – about race, gender, religion (the interviews took place at a Faith school), and politics;
- Values – showing how they position themselves in society according to their beliefs;
- Conduct – compliance with school rules, attitudes to behaviour and quality of teaching;
- Speech – patterns of speech, and also their ability to communicate on different levels;
- Dress – there is the opportunity to opt in (or out) of various patterns of dress which include the way their peers dress and the way the school and parents expect them to dress;

- Manners – do they adopt different forms of behaviour in different situations?

These indicators are similar to the ones described by Reay (1995a) to explain the embodiment of cultural capital, and have been weaved into the interview questions by asking the participants to discuss what is most appropriate or desirable or more likely to lead to success.

This will enable me to discuss how the pupils in the group discussions use their invested capital to negotiate school as an experienced, ‘lived’ space on a day-to-day basis. Interspersed with this will be observations from the interviews with adults to show the extent to which the participants are negotiating successfully.

That will be followed by a discussion of the ‘imagined’ spaces of their future education and careers. These are fields which they will encounter, but at the moment can only construct from their experiences in other, different, fields. Included in this analysis are observations about how the staff at the school construct their version of the field around the pupils.

2.7 Choosing (or rejecting) Higher Education

This section will review research into educational choice. While this research project is concerned with the choices young people are making at age fourteen, it is also concerned with the way these young people position themselves on an educational trajectory either towards or away from Higher Education. Therefore the choices they make at this stage, while ostensibly about the immediate choice of subject, have important implications for future careers. Cultural capital comes into play when choices are made which enable the development of higher levels of capital, and these higher levels of capital enable access to Higher Education.

There is a great deal of research investigating why people from under-represented groups of society persist in turning away from entry to Higher Education. The studies vary in type, from large scale to small scale, and contain both qualitative and quantitative data. Some research is more concerned with the subjects young people choose and will be considered in a separate section. The age group of participants tends to be in the young adult range, where decisions have been made already. There are few reports which investigate the decision process while it is happening, as happens in this thesis. In addition, where research has been carried out with younger individuals, it often does not involve theoretical considerations of habitus.

While Ball et al.'s (2002) study considers the choice of Higher Education institution of students principally in the 16-19 age range, the research is nevertheless relevant to this thesis – my research investigates the same process, but at an earlier stage in pupils' careers. Hanafin & Lynch's (2002) study demonstrates again that social class is of enormous importance. But to what extent do pupils make conscious, rational decisions based on objective consideration of options and goals open to them? In my own experience, I have observed how the choice process is 'engineered' by schools so that pupils are guided towards the 'appropriate course' – in reality this means that higher-performing (and so assumed higher-ability) pupils embark on traditional 'academic' courses leading directly to college admission, while pupils of lower perceived ability are put on 'vocational' courses to lead them towards a trade. And, since the distribution of pupils on the vocational-academic continuum tends to be class-based, this guidance, given in good faith by school practitioners mitigates against the high performing middle-class pupils who may possibly enjoy a more vocational route, or the working-class pupils who are perhaps unaware that Higher Education is a feasible option.

Ball et al. (2002), in research studying sixth-formers' choices of Higher Education institutions across the 1990s, describe the process as 'decision making' rather than 'choice', and that within this decision process there are many sub-texts. Significant among these is social class, which has the effect that 'choice of university is a choice of lifestyle and a matter of taste' (Ball et al. 2002: 53). In other words, students were making rational decisions, but based on a range of factors not all to do with an 'objective' process of weighing the relative merits in educational terms, and certainly not restricted to thoughts of future earnings-potential. Often it is more a case of *not* choosing, and thus remaining on the outside of Higher Education by default. This is illustrated by the observation that students making choices about Higher Education often relied on what Ball and Vincent (1998) describe as 'hot' knowledge – that supplied to the students through their involvement with, for example, people from their own background. This is in contrast to 'cold' knowledge, delivered by practitioners in the classroom without obvious context, which was often ineffective, both because it is delivered without a context relevant to the youngsters and because it is given too late. The 'hot' knowledge described above has been available through family and friendship networks for a long time before the 'cold' knowledge becomes available.

There is significant evidence to suggest that young working-class boys have often rejected the middle-class culture offered by their schools. Furlong and Cartmel (2006:15) explain how sociologists have used Bourdieu's concept of habitus to describe how these 'processes of social reproduction seem both natural and inevitable'.

The researchers described above tend to utilise a mixed methodology, using statistics to present the picture and then focusing qualitatively on individual accounts. For example Ball et al.'s (2002) study gathers quantitative information about social

class and destinations in Higher Education, and then proceeds to use questionnaires issued to large numbers of participants, and interviews conducted with individuals and with focus groups. They gathered data from six institutions over a significant period of time, and were able to deal with issues of reliability and validity: they report that their data defends strongly the notions of 'careership' and 'pragmatically rational decision making' (p 52) developed in Hodgkinson and Sparkes' (1997) work.

Brooks' (2003) case study of middle-class students making decisions about Higher Education destinations uses a much smaller sample, based in a single institution, making use of discourse analysis drawn from interviews with individuals and groups. In studying this work, it is possible to identify the degree to which groups of students are able to exercise agency in their choices. For example, there are confident individuals who form hierarchical league tables of their intended destinations, choosing only those which fit into the 'top 30', as defined by newspaper surveys.

There is a perceived tendency in young people to turn away from Higher Education because they do not feel that they fit in, but this needs further exploration. Archer, Hollingworth and Halsall (2007) found, in a study of urban working-class young people, that this is not due to lack of aspiration, nor to feelings of inferiority which many have directed at working-class children. Many of the young people in their study had already made a considerable financial investment in social capital in order to establish an identity with which they were comfortable, and which enabled them to 'belong' to their chosen peer group. They were unable to make the financial commitment to maintain this identity while studying at university, and therefore rejected the idea of study. In a similar study, Archer and Yamashita (2003) found no evidence of low aspiration as such, but described how the respondents felt that a university education was 'for other people'. In both studies, the significant capital

investment (economic and social) in forming a strong identity made it very difficult for the respondents to view themselves in the HE context. It could equally be argued that HE did not ‘suit’ their habitus.

Reay et al. (2005), in an extensive study of young people in a variety of secondary schools in the private and public sectors, found (p 159) that “social class was found to be the main predictor of choosing high-status universities...” The study makes extensive use of Bourdieu’s work in order to interpret their data, and is therefore of significant importance for this thesis.

2.8 Pupils’ choice of curriculum subject

In 2005, the DfES commissioned a literature review of pupil choices at key stage three. The purpose of the research was to:

- Investigate and report on literature which had bearing on the *processes* by which decisions are made during and at the end of Key Stage 3...;
- Discover the timescale and the important influences involved in that decision making process.

(McCrone, Morris and Walker, 2005: 7)

The authors of the review surveyed twenty research reports ranging over a period from 1999 onwards (though with a small number of earlier reports that were considered sufficiently important) and investigated how the decision-making process was perceived by pupils in year nine. They found that pupils applied judgements of the value of a curriculum in terms of its intrinsic value (their enjoyment of the subject), its extrinsic value (its usefulness in future careers or education), and their own ability to undertake the subject. There was some debate as to the meaning of the term ‘enjoyment’, and support for further research to investigate whether enjoyment of a subject leads to greater motivation and success. Careers education was surveyed, and

the team concluded that well-timed intervention enabled pupils to make appropriate judgements, sometimes selecting subjects on their extrinsic worth even when the enjoyment of the subject was limited. The careers service and teachers were found to influence decision making to a degree, but it was not clear whether the influence was due to perceived quality of teaching (either through success with examinations or successful classroom practice).

“Literature on the influence of *home background* [authors’ italics] on young people’s subject choices appeared, largely, to be limited to the impact of socioeconomic circumstances ... and of parental advice. At present, opinion is divided as to how much parents influence their children’s year 9 options.”

(McCrone, Morris and Walker 2005: 48)

Effectively they are calling for more research into home background, and a project investigating the place of family in the process of choice is therefore apposite. The report goes on to list a number of related elements where they found little or no research. These include issues around the content and structure of the school curriculum:

- “The specific role played by young people’s career aspirations;
- The extent to which young people understand the potential implications of the decisions they make at age 14 and the extent to which they even consider such decisions to be important;
- The part played by young people’s role models and of media presentations of subjects (and of careers);
- Young people’s educational mindsets.”

(McCrone, Morris and Walker 2005: 48)

But from my discussion of habitus, if home background is as influential as is suggested by Bourdieu, then career aspirations will be bound up in the expectations of the family and will have developed in the growing mind from an early age. Therefore in a similar way young people from different backgrounds and with different aspirations will read the implications of their decisions differently. Young people are likely to look to role models to help them visualise their own place in society. It is therefore pertinent to find where these role models come from, since it has generally been assumed that the teacher is a significant role model for young people. While McCrone, Morris and Walker (2005) report that teachers are identified as an influence in decision-making, this is somewhat different from asserting that they are role models. In fact Bricheno and Thornton (2007), reporting on their findings from existing research, suggest that there is very little evidence that young people recognise teachers as role models, preferring instead representatives from the family, or from the worlds of sport and entertainment.

For example Adey and Biddulph (2001), in a study of pupil choices in the Humanities at year nine found that pupils used a naïve and ill-formed idea of the usefulness of subjects in making choices for their post-14 curriculum. Choices were mostly based on their opinions of the subject rather than any perceived long-term benefits. They go on to describe how previous research has identified five factors influencing choices at this stage – three are linked to their opinions of the subject (liking, ability and usefulness), and two to guidance given by adults (parents and teachers), although researchers do not always agree on the relative weighting of the factors. This does not entirely accord with an adult's interpretation of rational choice based on a long-term view of that choice, but from the pupil's point of view, selecting a

subject just because they like it, or because they get on with the teacher, is entirely rational in their own short-term view.

However, the influence of these factors can go back a long way – Fosskett, Lumby and Maringe (2003) Studied post-16 choices in London, and although the study looked at a range of cultural issues in some detail, one factor relevant to this project which emerged was the influence of fashion, and the need for pupils to seem ‘cool’ to their colleagues. This is redolent of the references to ‘hot’ knowledge and ‘cold’ knowledge in the context of Ball and Vincent’s (1998) work. Habitus is rooted in the family upbringing, and young people are more strongly influenced by the people they have grown up with than by professionals in the education sector with whom they have relatively little contact. Similarly, Hodkinson (1995) found parental influence was often not in the form of specific advice, more that it was grounded in long-term family influence – youngsters tended to follow the career or educational path of other members of the family.

2.9 Bourdieu and a qualitative approach to research

Grenfell (2008: 24) describes how Bourdieu was wary of postmodernism because he saw it as a

“... way of destroying concepts that had been hard won in the course of human development: for example the state, the welfare state, society, truth, etc. His own route was to develop a philosophical language – key concepts – that would act as an antidote to everyday language and thus the way it occulted the social processes that had produced it.”

The key concepts of capital and habitus illustrate the objection to a postmodern approach which would require an analysis of discourse where the use and meaning of language must be deconstructed. In this project I am investigating responses by young

people to a highly structured environment defined by the policies, institutions, actions and language of others. It is how the participants respond to these structures which is of interest to this project. Late in his life, Bourdieu objected to the kind of study prevalent in American sociology which sought to use statistics and rational action theory to predict outcomes of social processes, though he certainly recognised the value of statistical analysis to complement our understanding of the social world (Grenfell, 2008). Interestingly, some commentators criticise Bourdieu's work on the grounds that it implies determinism (which Bourdieu never intended).

Critics of research which makes use of Bourdieu's concepts of capital have also referred to difficulties in defining and measuring social capital. As Edwards, Franklin and Holland (2003: 8) put it,

“The diversity of interpretations, even within ... mainstream approaches ..., has led to a lack of consensus about what precisely constitutes social capital, so that the gathering and analysis of statistical information about its presence or absence is problematic.”

However, levels of cultural and social capital can be identified, and their influence on various social outcomes in qualitative terms can be investigated with a good degree of consistency. A qualitative approach can enable researchers to gain a greater understanding of the mechanisms which support the reproduction of inequalities and thus to shed light on processes which might start to reverse these mechanisms.

The research in the preceding sections of the literature review share a common thread in their methodologies. Most make some use of statistical data to illustrate some problem (most often inequalities and injustices in the education system), but then all refer to interviews and discussions with participants, who form a small proportion of the cohort involved in the statistical analysis, to find out about how they relate as

individuals to the field in question. This cannot be achieved through statistical analysis alone, and as a consequence I shall be proposing a methodology which, while fundamentally qualitative, does nevertheless acknowledge the need for some statistical input.

2.10 Summary

The concept of habitus provides an important framework for studying injustice and inequality in education. It can be used to explain the ability of the middle-classes to obtain cultural and social capital, and to negotiate successful pathways through the educational system. It also provides a mechanism by which the middle-classes are able to maintain the system for their own use by excluding those from outside their class from gaining cultural and social capital. This is not to say that individuals from outside the privileged sections of society are not able to invest sufficient capital to transform their situation, but the transformation can be complex. In order to become ‘members of the club’, individuals must conform to the rules of the institution, and this can involve the abandonment of principles which hold the individual to their former status.

Willis (1977) argued that some individuals actively choose to remain outside by their adoption of attitudes which rebel against the educational system, and concludes that habitus is therefore inadequate to deal with such people. But in fact, if a new set of behaviours and dispositions (in other words, a change of habitus) is required in order to succeed in education, then there may well be pressures to resist such change. This needs to be tested in research. Much of the ‘Widening Participation’ agenda is predicated on research which consistently shows that wage-earning increases significantly for people with degrees and the underlying assumption that the pursuit of a degree is therefore a desirable outcome, but for some people this may be a step too far.

Chapter three

The Policy Context

3.1 Introduction

This thesis seeks to illuminate the social and cultural influences behind young people's decisions to opt for a given career or educational trajectory.

In chapter two I discussed Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus and field and how these concepts are inextricably linked. The 'field' of education as seen by the pupils within it is not a level playing field – some are more successful than others at negotiating it even when prior ability is taken into account. In this chapter I “Map out the objective structures of relations between the positions occupied by the social agents or institutions who compete for the legitimate forms of specific authority of which this field is a site.” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 104-5)

Therefore a detailed description of government policy (and that includes how individual schools interpret that policy) is highly significant since policy is used to set the agenda by which schools and local authorities operate systems to provide education and opportunity for young people. The pupils in this survey must navigate through the education system provided for them – they are not in a position to have any affect on this policy or its implementation.

This chapter is concerned with the nature of the education system these pupils encounter. This system has developed and evolved since the 1944 Education Acts in a number of different ways, all of which are pertinent to this survey. Drawing on Gillard (2011) and others, Annex 6 presents a timeline of key policy developments in the years from 1944 to 2007, when the empirical data was being collected.

The 1944 Acts extended the system of free and compulsory education for all children such that in theory every child had an equal and fair chance of making progress through the system appropriate to their individual needs. That is not to say that every child had an equal chance of high attainment – it was established from the start that there was a need for differentiated provision depending on the capability of the individual child. However the aim was that all children of a given ability would have an equal opportunity to progress.

The first focus of the chapter briefly charts the developments that have taken place since the 1944 Acts to arrive at the type of schools which exist at the time of this research project. The study takes place in a Catholic comprehensive school which is also a Technology College, and this section traces the origins of schools such as these in the 60 years between 1944 and the commencement of the project. The discussion is relevant because the consistent two-fold aim of government education interventions either sought to improve quality, or to extend participation in Higher Education by under-represented groups of society. The concept of ‘high-quality education’ transformed significantly after the Conservative Government took office in 1979. The second focus traces the quality issue from this time through to the current situation in which schools are under severe pressure to meet stringent performance targets in order to compete with neighbouring schools (which now have become rivals instead of partners).

The third focus of this chapter deals with the large body of evidence that this equal and fair chance has never been a reality. Halsey, Heath and Ridge (1980), DfES (2003) and Broecke and Hamed (2008) published the results from extensive national data sets which show that the attainment of working-class children and young adults has been weaker than that of their middle-class counterparts whether referring to

representation in Higher Education, or attainment of qualifications such as A-level examinations. Commenting on educational research into issues of social class in the compulsory sector since 1944, Archer (2003: 5) explains that “...it has been noted that working-class children tend to experience persistently lower rates of attainment and are less likely to follow routes into post-compulsory education”. Successive governments have recognised this inequality and have tried a variety of measures to address it – both in the structure of the education system, and in attempts to establish measurable quality. These later commentaries have come to be placed under a concept now referred to as Widening Participation, which, according to the Higher Education Academy is:

“...concerned with addressing patterns of under-representation in HE, as certain groups of students are proportionally under-represented in the UK. Particular under-represented groups are those from lower socioeconomic groups or working-class backgrounds, low participation neighbourhoods and families with no experience of HE.”

Higher Education Academy website, 2011

The definition is helpful because it refers specifically to families who do not have previous attendance in Higher Education, and recognises that this is a significant factor in the failure of under-represented groups of society to take advantage of Higher Education.

3.2 Striving for educational equality

Equality in education has been on the agenda for a long time.

The 1944 Education Acts established the principle of a tripartite system of Secondary Modern, Technical and Grammar schools to cater for the differing needs of the population. The intention was that they provided all pupils with an equal opportunity to attend the school matched to their ability and need.

Secondary Modern schools taught skills and knowledge that would be of use in the office, factory and workshop; Technical schools (though not many were established) prepared pupils for apprenticeship; while the Grammar schools were attended by those destined for management. The 1944 Acts did not actually specify which type of schools Local Authorities should establish, but the wisdom of the time seemed to accept that children were intellectually inclined either to practical or abstract thought (Jones 2003). The Technical and Secondary Modern schools focused chiefly on practical subjects, with basic instruction in Mathematics and English; and the Grammar schools provided the opportunity for abstract thought by offering a more theoretical curriculum with a minimal provision of practical subjects.

The underlying assumption was of preparation for a lifetime in work, and very often in the same type of work. Careers advice at the time would have involved pigeon-holing youngsters into local factories and industries wherever vacancies occurred. The idea of travelling away from home to seek employment would have been unusual.

When the Labour Government came to power in 1964, the under-representation of working-class children in Grammar schools was a significant concern. This government began to introduce Comprehensive schools in an initiative referred to by Prime Minister Harold Wilson as 'Grammar Schools for all'. As Webster and Parsons (1999) point out, this slogan is an example of a sociological absurdity, since the very point of a Grammar School had been the fact that not all could attend. But as Giddens (2006) suggests, the aim of the new Comprehensive schools was to provide an equality of opportunity that was not possible with selective education. At this time, the concept of 'quality' was not measured in terms of the number of pupils achieving stated grades in national tests and exams. Secondary Modern schools saw their mission as one which provided children with the necessary education for future employment, and this did not

require them to demonstrate very much in the way of certificated qualifications. A few children were able to progress from these schools into further and higher education, but not many. For example Galindo-Rueda and Vignoles (2005), reviewing data from the 1970s and 80s, found that high-ability children ‘misclassified’ into a Secondary Modern school suffered a negative impact on their education from which they didn’t recover when considering either later educational attainment or total time spent in education. Findings such as these fuelled the feeling that Secondary Modern schools tended to hold back the progress of their pupils.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Labour governments sought to replace the tri- and bi-partite systems with comprehensive schools, and while Conservative governments and councils fought against this, they never turned public opinion wholeheartedly in favour of selective secondary education (Crook 2002). Nonetheless, figures continued to show that over a long period, changes in the educational system did not achieve a reduction in the gap in attainment between upper and lower socioeconomic groups.

In 1972, a large study (the Oxford Mobility project) was undertaken by the Nuffield Organisation, and the data were used by a number of researchers, including by Halsey, Heath and Ridge (1980), to investigate the origins and destinations of nearly 10,000 men in England and Wales. The research team investigated links between class and attainment, and between schooling and attainment. Although the prospect of an all-male study which sought to generalise in this way would nowadays seem extraordinary, the conclusions were wide-ranging and significant, and provided much of the impetus for the education policy debates of the 1980s. The study moved the debate on from earlier works by researchers such as Glass in 1949 which described the status of education in the generation before the Second World War (Glass 1954), and

supplemented by work from writers such as Goldthorpe, Llewellyn and Payne (1980) who also made use of the 1972 survey, to study social mobility.

In their work, Halsey, Heath and Ridge (1980: 75) discussed the effect of cultural capital, reasoning that:

“...parents who have passed through the academic institutions of grammar school, public school, or university will have a greater understanding of the educational system and its culture and will be better equipped to help their children cope with the demands of that system. Their children will be more likely to acquire ‘that system of predispositions’ necessary for success in the competitive selection tests that have been prevalent in the English education system...”

So working-class children were seriously under-represented in post-16 education, and to illustrate how this gap persisted, Willis (1977) investigated ‘cultural reproduction’, or using the sub-title of his book, ‘how working class kids get working class jobs’. At the time it was generally understood that youngsters grew up with an expectation of failure in their education, and through this failure learned to believe that they had an intellectual inferiority and entered careers and jobs with limited prospects. However, Willis found a very different version of reality. His investigation centred on a group of working-class white boys, who developed a distinctive culture which rebelled against the establishment, working the system to their own advantage. This aloofness to and rejection of authority at school was carried on in the world of work – work was a means to obtaining a wage and not a means to gaining satisfaction through earning potential in a rewarding occupation. Cultural reproduction existed in the way that the boys resisted any opportunities to change their outcomes and thus perpetuated the

educational pathways exhibited in their families. Willis argued against the use of habitus to explain this situation.

Towards the 1970s, formation of educational policy began to become more and more significant as an electoral issue, until as Woods (2002: 120) points out, it had become second only to health by 2001:

“...the electorate has evolved from one predominantly influenced by strong party and ideological loyalties, grounded in social class, to one which is more willing to vote according to its response to the principles, policies, and records of parties and leaders engaged in the campaign. There is now an enlarged ‘issues space’ in which concerns do not necessarily map neatly onto the traditional Left-Right divide.”

3.3 Striving for Educational Quality

The Conservative Government of the 1980s started a significant shift in direction for education in the UK. While equality of opportunity remained an important focus for educationalists, government policy developed practices in defining quality which moved the focus towards the provision of parental choice.

It was intended that market forces would determine which school children would attend, and Conservatives introduced a quasi-market, which mimics the economic market, and which assumes that parents will choose more successful schools for the education of their children, and so weaker schools will be forced to improve. As Woods (2002) points out, this is not straightforward, and the Conservatives adopted a hybrid approach, combining the market force ideology along with cultural conservatism which resulted in the prescription of the curriculum as a means of defending standards and values.

This served to distract from the issue of equality of opportunity and demonstrates that at least until 2003 Government policy focused on *quality* rather than *equality*. Schools were judged on their ability to achieve well in league tables, not on their ability to improve the prospects and progress of children who had begun their education at a disadvantage. As reported by Maw (1999), when the league tables were first published in 1992, many newspapers printed the raw data irrespective of any school context. She goes on to make the case for the concept of ‘value-added’, which did not appear to occur to some sections of the media (notably the right-wing media), and schools were listed in strict order of the number of successful GCSE results. Schools in deprived areas were almost invariably low down in the league tables however well they performed, because their pupils’ performance on entry was lower than the national average. Even when such a school performed well and their pupils made significant progress, they might nevertheless remain below the national average. Attempts were made to apply a value-added approach to the league tables and according to Maw (1999), the Observer in 1997 printed a table in which performance scores were adjusted to take account of social measures such as free school meals and numbers of pupils with special educational needs. She mentions a report in the Observer by Bright (1997: 1):

“The results explode the myth that inner city comprehensives are providing a poor education. Two of the *Observer* top 10 schools are in Hackney, London’s poorest borough, and six are comprehensives where more than 50 per cent are on free school meals.”

Attempts to include social measures in the analysis of performance data failed to make any progress, and Goldstein (1998) at the time criticised the over-simplification too-often applied in the analysis of quantitative data resulting in false conclusions. All

such calls for the use of social measures in the league tables ultimately failed, as successive governments sought to emphasise the significance of actual pupil performance.

From the 1990s onwards, the culture of ‘performativity’ began to take hold. This involves the development of an atmosphere within schools such that, for example, the staff of one department might be encouraged to set targets in competition with a ‘rival’ department in the same school. Where previously the tripartite system of Technical, Grammar and Secondary Modern schools were able to operate to a certain extent autonomously and in partnership, under the system of Comprehensive schools (and more so after the subsequent re-ordering of schools into Technology Colleges, Academies and others), the culture evolved into one of regulation and competition. Neighbouring schools were no longer partners in education, they were rivals. As Ball (2003: 218) puts it:

“The ethics of competition and performance are very different from the older ethics of professional judgement and co-operation. A new basis for ethical decision-making and moral judgement is erected by the ‘incentives’ of performance.”

Ball goes on to describe how the “new culture of competitive performativity” employs a range of tactics including the use of targets (in this sense the targets relate to teachers’ individual performance) to regulate teachers and managers by encouraging them to take control of the target-setting process. This is deeply paradoxical, because while they are ostensibly offered as a move away from centralised control, they in fact provide a mechanism for far greater surveillance of performance at all levels. Therefore schools employ more and more sophisticated methods of predicting and improving

pupil performance, and by this process manage the operation of league tables with the aim of optimising the school's position in the tables.

One of the factors the league tables failed to take into account was the fact that selective schools (even those not primarily selecting according to ability) are able to refuse entry to pupils whom they feel lack the motivation to progress in education so that consequently the non-selective schools have to deal with these pupils in addition and add what value they can. West, Pennell and Hind (2003) describe how this 'stealthy' approach can be applied: schools are able to select pupils to three ability 'bands', a measure designed to allow an even ability spread. Some schools are able to skew the banding towards the higher ability by adjusting the weighting of the bands providing any band is not 'substantially under-represented'.

The process went on unhindered when New Labour came to power in 1997: the party sought a 'Third Way', in which the State would step in on behalf of the socially excluded to foster self-sufficiency rather than dependency. The result of this was that quality continued to be seen almost exclusively in terms of numbers of pupils achieving a target grade. As Garratt & Forrester (2012) maintain, the drive towards improvement continued, and the requirement that schools set challenging targets for their pupils intensified. This drive towards a competitive educational environment led to the introduction by New Labour of Academies, a process described by Wrigley (2009). This represented a new direction in educational policy towards privatisation, and while (so far) Academies have been non-profit making enterprises, there is nonetheless a strong private (and therefore not publically accountable) interest in placing the emphasis on economic competitiveness as the dominant operational factor.

The Coalition (Hatcher & Jones 2011) seeks to take this one step further, introducing Free Schools partly based on the Swedish model – where the system does have a profit

motive. According to Lundahl (2011) these profits are not necessarily put back into the school in which the profits originated. She goes on to warn that contrary to the Coalition's publicity, resulting improvements in school performance have not been observed in the Swedish system, where Free Schools have been in place for two decades.

3.4 The gap in attainment

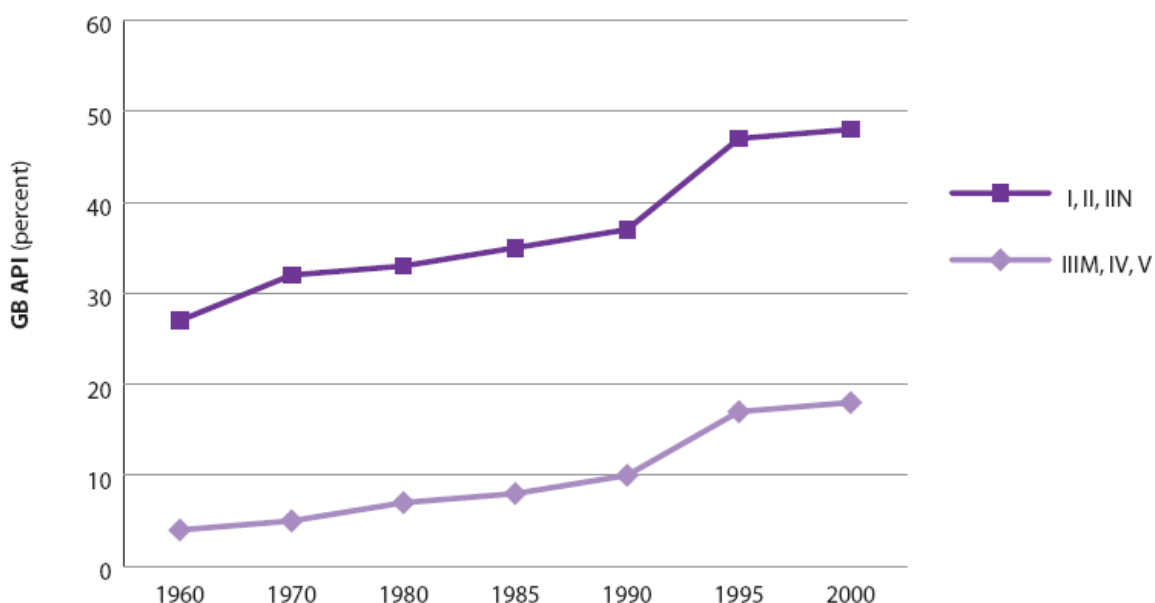
Studies from the 1940s up until the end of the 1960s demonstrated a lack of social mobility and pointed to the inability of people from working-class backgrounds to gain qualifications on a par with those from higher social classes. While the policies were designed to address this issue, research in the latter half of the twentieth century 'continued to show that people from social classes one and two were significantly more likely to enter Higher Education than those from classes three to five. A report commissioned by the (then) Department for Education and Science included a survey of participation in Higher Education over the last 40 years of the twentieth century. Figure 3.1 (DfES 2003: 17) displays the percentage from two social groups who have entered Higher Education, and shows how this gap has persisted and at times even widened over a period of 40 years. This was despite a significant increase in Higher Education provision during this period driven, as Jones (2003) explains, by the need to keep up with rival powers in the fields of science and technology. Although both graphs rise steadily over the years, the graph for groups one and two always rises more steeply. Whatever initiatives are being put in place to encourage wider participation, all groups appear to be benefiting more or less equally, and the investment is not finding its way efficiently to the most needy. The middle-classes, already in a position of advantage, seem better able to take further advantage.

While involvement in Higher Education in this period has risen from around 4% to 18% in groups three to five, it has risen by a larger amount (from 27% to 48%) in groups one and two. There are no periods in those 40 years where the gap appears to narrow at any stage. The increased levels of participation across all social groups suggest that class need not present a barrier to educational progression. However, Furlong (2005: 380) asserts that “... [nevertheless] persistent patterns of disadvantage associated with factors such as social class, neighbourhood deprivation and ‘ethnicity’ are still deeply entrenched.”

According to the same Government White Paper, “This state of affairs cannot be tolerated in a civilised society” (DfES 2003: 18), and the paper goes on to declare a commitment to closing this gap, and indicates a number of factors which contribute to this situation:

- “young people achieving good A-levels from all social groups are equally likely to enter Higher Education;
- more than twice as many 18 year olds in social groups I-IIN achieve two or more A-levels than those in groups IIIM-V;
- aspiration to attend Higher Education in the lower social groups is significantly less.”

Figure 3.1: Higher education entrants by social class group (1960-2000)



Crown copyright, 2003

Government policy is therefore directed towards increasing attainment and aspiration in social groups with a view to reducing and ending this gap in entry to Higher Education. The report indicates that this takes place at an early age:

“There are still significant barriers of aspiration facing young people from non-traditional backgrounds, as well as disabled students and those from some ethnic minority groups.

59 per cent of a sample of 16–30 year olds from social classes C1, C2, D and E did not plan ever to go to university, and almost half of the sample had never thought about doing a degree. 45 per cent of the sample agreed that ‘the student image is not for me’. And aspirations are often set at an early age – one study found that the decision to participate in Higher Education was made by the age of 14 by the majority of pupils, and some made the decision even earlier.”

(DfES 2003: 69)

The final point leads to the fundamental purpose of this research, which is to explore the influences for this apparent low aspiration by some young people. If the majority of pupils aged 14 appear to have made up their minds already, it seems apposite to investigate the influences which lead to such decision making while it is still fresh in their minds.

A report by Broecke and Hamed (2008), using an extensive nationwide dataset, investigates this further and finds that there are gaps in entry to Higher Education between women and men, between young people from white backgrounds and those from ethnic minorities, and between young people on Free School Meals and those who aren't.

Their figures suggest that in recent years, more women than men have entered Higher Education, but that this is because women show better attainment at GCSE and at A-level, and once prior attainment is taken into account, this gap disappears.

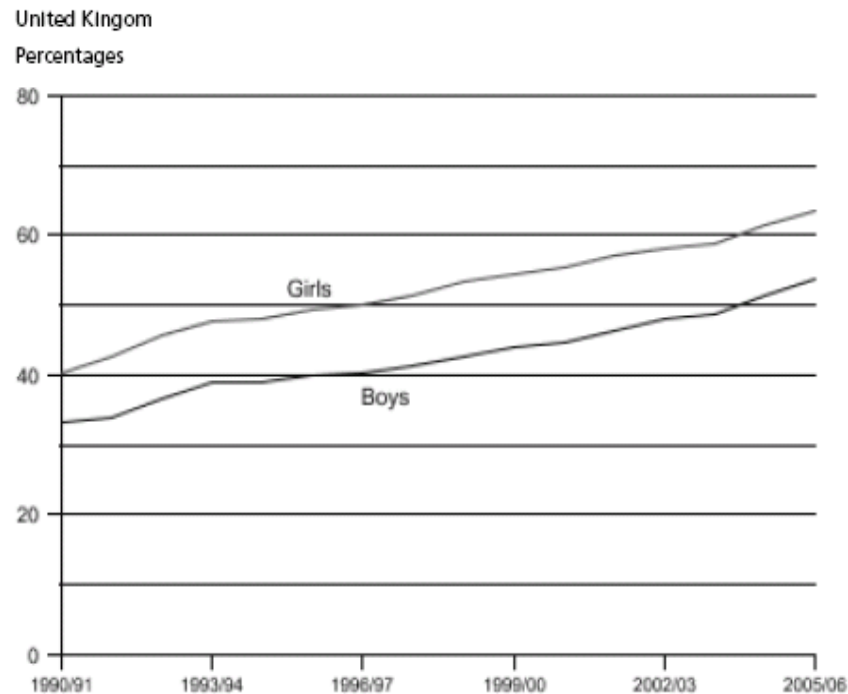
However, young white working-class males are significantly less likely to enter Higher Education than young males from middle-class backgrounds, even when prior attainment (in the form of performance at GCSE level) has been taken into account. Finally, a small gap persists with young people eligible for free school meals, which “suggests that something else affects the likelihood to participate in Higher Education, over and above prior attainment.” (Broecke and Hamed, 2008: 1).

The above analysis suggests that there are effects that mitigate against entry to Higher Education for certain sections of society, and for a number of reasons. Various factors are at play here – gender, class, and ethnicity all play a part – but it is also true that all these factors relate in different ways to the position of young people in society. These lead to inequalities in representation in Higher Education and the implication is that these inequalities relate to decisions, aspirations and achievements at an early stage

of education, well before the point of entry into Higher Education. It may well be that issues of aspiration and motivation are at work here, and these will in turn relate to cultural and social influences which are particular to individuals and families. The way individuals negotiate these influences are individual, but strongly influenced by cultural and social background.

As implied here, gender cannot be ignored. Giddens (2006) summarises the many ways in which girls have been treated differently from boys and suggests that while attitudes are changing, the influences are nevertheless still marked: popular girls' stories often portray girls in domestic or school situations; girls are still expected to wear dresses or skirts in some schools; some subjects are treated (whether explicitly or by implication) as 'unsuitable' for girls (this is true also for boys, but here the 'unsuitable' subjects are less likely to be academically prestigious). In spite of this, trends show that girls have outperformed boys in a range of measures, for example in the achievement of GSCE grades (Figure 3.2). While the gap is significant and persistent, it is smaller than that shown in Figure 3.1 relating to social class.

Figure 3.2 Pupils achieving five or more GCSE grades A*-C or equivalent: by sex



Office for National Statistics (2008: 4)

Giddens (2006) goes on to argue that statistics such as those shown in Figure 3.2, and others which show that women outperform men in most subjects and at most stages of education, are used to argue for greater investment in the education of boys to address the gap, but ignore the factors which lead to women being much less likely to enter professions involving the STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), and much less likely to enter managerial positions. In fact, the underachievement of boys is much more likely to have something to do with disadvantages relating to social class rather than their gender.

An investigation into the part played by ethnicity is far more complex, and reveals for example that there are differences in educational success if children from Black Caribbean families are compared with Asian children. The racial mix of the

population I investigated was severely limited, and not of statistical significance. Therefore consideration of ethnicity will form only an incidental part of this project.

These factors continue to be issues for discussion and debate, and gaps in attainment persist (Cole 2012). Since it appears that social background is a contributory factor even to the gap in attainment between young men and young women, again this study is concerned mainly with the social and cultural position of young people approaching the crucial decision-making part of their lives. Gender is certain to play a part in this, since it is embedded in the culture of each individual's family, and where this arises in the data it will be noted.

3.5 Widening Participation

In response to the persistent gap in attainment, successive governments have implemented a continual process which became known as 'Widening Participation'. New Labour set a Higher Education participation target of 50% of the under-30 population before 2010 (Archer et al., 2003). Although the aim of the target was to increase participation in traditionally under-represented groups, they question whether the target might be reached, if at all, by the recruitment of middle-class students and thus make the situation more unequal, not less. Nevertheless, there were a number of initiatives set up by New Labour to support the target of increased participation. Thomas (2011) describes how the Aimhigher programme became a collaborative venture in which Higher Education institutions worked together to promote aspiration in school pupils by providing summer schools and mentoring (by HE students appointed as advocates). While this co-operative action continued, the HE institutions enacted policies which encouraged application from under-represented groups, and Government funding supported this.

An intervention more school-oriented was the establishment of Connexions (Watts, 2001). This sought to provide in-school careers advice and guidance which targeted pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds (as defined by uptake of free school meals). Personal advisers were appointed to establish personal learning targets for individuals, and to work with the individuals on the steps needed to achieve these targets.

Participation rates have continued to rise until they reached approximately 46% in 2008/9 and then remained static for three years. (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2013). These statistics suggest at least some success for the initiatives, although Thomas (2011), in her literature review of research into these interventions, describes how prospective students from disadvantaged backgrounds still had a tendency to make decisions based on incomplete information provided by their nearest neighbouring institution. Such students tended not to seek information from further afield – much of the work carried out by Aimhigher involved local interventions, and many students did not travel far for the information.

The Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2013:3) also reports that participation rose abruptly by three percentage points in 2011/12 due to “a change in deferral behaviour”. Every year, a proportion of students defer entry for a variety of reasons, and far fewer chose to do this in 2011 because of the impending introduction of the £9000 annual fee payable through the student loan system which came into operation at the beginning of the academic year 2012/13. It remains to be seen how this will affect participation in future years.

3.6 Summary

Successive governments have directed education policy since the 1944 Education Act with the purpose of providing opportunities which are independent of

social factors, but the evidence discussed shows that this has not been successful. The changes of direction brought about by the Conservative Governments of the 1980s and the introduction of debates and policies designed to promote quality have had no effect on this trend, but have merely altered the field. The next chapters will investigate how the principal characters in the system, the pupils, negotiate the terrain.

Chapter four

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the research design that was adopted in this thesis, and will offer theoretical and methodological justifications for the stages of the research as these were followed.

The Research Questions underpinning the research design have evolved as the intentions of the research have developed. The motivation for this project in its final form emerged from a presentation (Cochrane 2007) entitled *Spoilt for Choice? Pupil perceptions of the options process at year 9*, which criticised the limitations imposed on children when they faced options for their GCSE studies at the end of year nine. I discussed how the range of courses was severely limited for reasons which often had nothing to do with the needs or desires of the pupils concerned. For example, a choice of modern foreign language might simply depend on which year of a two-year cycle was starting at the time, or on which language teacher was available that year. The school in this survey had operated a system whereby children in the designated ‘lower-ability’ classes were required to undertake a GNVQ Science course as an alternative to the traditional versions of GCSE Combined or Single Science taken by their more successful colleagues. It was clear at the same time that many pupils felt that the GNVQ course lacked the esteem of the GCSE version, and some parents confronted the school if they felt their children were being made to embark on what they saw as an inferior course. These parents often successfully lobbied to have their children moved onto the alternative syllabus, even if that involved a greater risk of lowering their final grades at age 16. All of these factors detract from the action of decision-making for the

children, and so it became important to me to investigate what the children themselves thought about all this.

Therefore the research questions have emerged in terms which seek their voice:

RQ1. How do individual pupils understand the process of career decision-making and construct their position towards this process, and what meaning and values do they assign to particular career paths?

RQ2. How do 'social class' and 'gender' underpin the pupil's decision making process, and to what extent are pupils able to understand and articulate this underpinning?

RQ3. What are the institutional influences on this process, and what are the pupils' experiences of these influences?

As a scientist, my previous attempts at research had adopted a positivist approach – the sort of investigation which seeks to measure a response to a stimulus, or to test a hypothesis. There is no hypothesis in this case, and Bourdieu's concept of habitus provides a rich framework for describing the behaviour and attitudes of the participants. From the seventeenth century onwards, empirical research has been described as an approach which makes use of our experience of the world in developing new knowledge. But as Fraser (2004) points out, this results in the problem that we all experience situations from different perspectives. This is particularly true when researching with children, who necessarily have a significantly different perspective from that of adults. This is not just because they are younger and have less life-experience, it is also that they are viewing their careers with the possibility of starting from scratch and constructing a future from the beginning without the benefit of hindsight possessed by adults who have engaged in the process, often more than once.

Much of the debate about methodology has concerned the participation of the individuals (whether children or adults) who form the subject of the research. This is partly because of increased awareness of the rights of individuals, but also because of a realisation that the authenticity of the research is compromised if all the decisions about the participants is made by the person conducting the research. This was particularly true of feminist research, and in the following sections I discuss models of participatory research, with reference to lessons learned from an analysis of feminist research.

4.2 Participatory research

The Research Questions thus evolved towards a format which enabled the involvement of the pupils as participants *in* the research rather than subjects *of* the research, and this poses interesting methodological and ethical questions. They are reasons to adopt a more generally-described interpretive approach which investigates pupil perspective in a way which is sensitive to young people's own voices. All young people in this situation will respond differently, and I am not seeking to generalise behaviour in an attempt to extrapolate applicable meaning. My aim is to get to the voices of the children so that I can understand how they perceive and interpret the social and cultural context and conditions within which they make their choices. Their motivations cannot be assumed to be the same as an adult's as their experiences of such pressures are very different from those of adults.

Smith (1988) describes a participatory project investigating women's involvement in a particular work organisation – in this case, mothers who worked at supporting their children's schooling. Traditional research methodology would have treated the women in the study as objects for observation; therefore it was necessary to develop a methodology which sought to express the women's experiences without

reinterpreting them from the researcher's viewpoint. This would involve in-depth interviews with the group of women in the first instance, and was evident in the data from interviews which were reported verbatim rather than coded into subtexts determined by the researcher.

Smith found limitations in interviewing subjects in that while there was some shared experience, for example knowing the structure of the school day and using terminology to refer to functions like break time and lunchtime, there were also implicit interpretations of the school day based on this assumed shared experience. Such interpretations were identified by the lack of discussion around the shared terminology and are embedded in the language of the interviews. The effect was ameliorated to a certain extent through interviews with staff at the school to enable fuller understanding of some of the terminology used by the participants and to place it into context. In the context of that organisation and integral to it are practices of impersonal evaluation used in documenting a child's relative status in the class, in the school, and in some instances, relative to an anonymous population for the purpose of defining standards for grade levels and other similar judgements. In transferring this idea into my research, I found it necessary to carry out staff interviews in order to set an accurate background for the comments made by the pupils, but not to provide data with which to categorise those comments.

A greater level of participation is now evident in recent examples of research with children and young people. Greig et al. (2013) advocate consultation with children over the conduct of research undertaken with them. This can involve a considerable degree of empowerment, as seen in research report by Thomas (2011) in which Aimhigher Greater Merseyside supported young researchers from local schools as they conducted research into progression routes from Secondary education.

Ideally, it could be argued that all research should be conducted in such an open and democratic manner. Since it is now recognised in law that children have the right to participate in personal decisions which directly affect them (Greig et al. 2013), it seems ethically and methodologically right to provide them with the means to do this as far as it is practically possible.

However, in this case I am making judgements and comparisons with a body of knowledge which is not accessible to the participants. Therefore the level of involvement that can be achieved is limited, and in designing the methodology I had to take this into account. After all, Greig et al. (2013) are promoting consultation with participants, and not suggesting that the design and conduct of the project be handed over to the pupils. They are concerned with listening to the participant voice, and for this reason I chose to make interviews with the pupils the central method of data collection. In order to develop confidence in establishing the authenticity of the participant voice, it would be necessary to interview more than once so that I would be able to discuss the progress of the research with them. I take this point further in the next section.

A number of the insights and developments in participatory research have their roots in feminist methodology, which grew out of a reaction to a tradition of research which regarded those being researched as objects to be observed and described. Feminists began to argue that a great deal of sociological research involved men observing and interpreting a world designed and fashioned for the benefit of men and for the oppression of women. Therefore, a movement began which suggested that traditional approaches to research with women should no longer be considered, and argued to replace them with a far more participatory approach. The standpoint of the researcher in relation to the researched was not of course the only issue. Depending on

the theoretical position of the feminist argument, there were strong calls for research that would be critical and emancipatory, with implications for the power relationships and ethics between the researcher and the participants to the research. Thus, pro-feminist research with women has developed over the years between different political positions. For example, Walby (1988) describes four different approaches to the study of women in the political arena:

- neglect (either by ignoring women altogether or by dismissing them as insignificant);
- criticism (of approaches which have treated women as irrelevant and which have ignored the exclusion of women from voting for example);
- addition (treating women's involvement in politics as exceptional);
- integration (women included into the central questions).

So the development of feminist and pro-feminist methodology has recognised the importance of participation in research, and according to Letherby (2003), this approach addresses issues of respect for the participants and the personal attachment of the researcher. More and more, these issues are emerging in which research aims to integrate children fully into the process, seeking and validating their views by reference to the children themselves.

Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) discuss distinctive features of methodology, but it is noticeable that their discussion centres more on what feminist methodology is not, and they point out that there is no particular technique, and no ontological or epistemological standpoint that is distinctly feminist.

However, they do argue (p. 15) that “feminist methodology is distinctive in how it locates the researcher in the research process”, and that it is “a requirement of feminist research to reflect critically on the place of the researcher in the process of knowledge

production”. They do add at this point that these features would also appear as good practice in other situations.

It is clear that the distinctive features of Smith’s (1988) work – the expression of women’s experience in their own words, the representation of a politically sensitive standpoint and the rejection of existing truths – can be recognised in the work of Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002).

However, in this case since young people can be quite reticent about giving opinions, seeking respondent validation from them will be more practical. Thus interpretations, for example from shared language, can be referred back to a sample of the participants, effectively to ask them ‘is this what you meant to say?’

4.3 Ethical issues in researching with children

Towards the end of the 20th century, there was an increasing awareness of human rights, and more specifically, of the rights of children. Until the 1980s, ethical considerations in sociological research were limited to the avoidance of harm. However the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and later the European Convention on Human Rights (1998) brought a broader interpretation of the concept of child protection beyond shelter from abuse. David et al. (2001), describing their own experiences of researching with children in this era, discuss how bodies such as the British Educational Research Association (BERA) and the British Psychological Society (BPS) set up ethical guidelines in the early 21st century which have now become the accepted standard adopted by research institutions in the UK. Hammersley & Traianou (2012) give detailed guidance on the application of the BERA guidelines, and no new research is likely to gain ethical approval if it does not adhere to guidelines such as these.

Hammersley & Traianou (2012) for example, focus on the currently increased awareness of the ability of children and young people to make decisions for themselves concerning their involvement in a research project. Alderson (2005) asserts that this entails a change to considering children as ‘subjects’ of the research rather than as ‘objects’, and that for example, we cannot assume that parental permission for access to a young person overrides that person’s willingness to participate.

It is evident therefore, that the final decision as to whether the pupils in this project should participate or not rested solely with the individual pupils themselves. This can only happen if the participant is fully informed of the purpose and nature of the research, in which case the onus then falls on the designer of the research to make the information available in a format which does not patronise them (Alderson 2005).

Once consent has been given and as the research progresses, the participants’ understanding of the process progresses too, and the consent to remain involved must be continuously reviewed in the light of this developing knowledge. It cannot be assumed that consent freely given at the outset will not be withdrawn at a later date. It is incumbent upon the researcher to be aware of this, because coercing a participant to continue against their wish (or continuing when there is no benefit to the participant) is ethically unsound (David et al. 2001). The exercise of power in this way has relatively recently been recognised as a significant issue, and David et al. (2001) discuss a number of techniques by which certain aspects of power can be returned to the participant.

In this project I collect data from the participants themselves, but also from their teachers, and from the school’s database of examination scores. Ownership of these cannot easily be transferred to others without breaching confidentiality, and indeed one of the key aspects of ethical research is the protection of the participants from unwanted recognition.

The traditional approach for a study of this kind would be to approach the guardians of the children concerned, and to seek permission of access. In this context, the guardians are the family (through the parents or legal guardians of the children) and also the school (through the senior management team and the board of governors). As well as an ethical consideration, this is also a legal one, and therefore formal permission was sought from the board of governors to approach the children. In practice, this involved acting through an intermediary, one of the senior members of staff, to negotiate access to the selected cohort of children. But a more important and overriding permission of access was then sought from the children themselves, with an explanation that they had been chosen for this research because of their age group, and because they faced interesting choices in their near future concerning education and career. Under the current guidelines, the researcher is aware that specific permission from the parents should also have been obtained.

The children consented willingly to be interviewed, and accepted my assurances of anonymity and confidence – in other words they would not be personally identified by anything I wrote about them, and nothing they said would be reported within the school. They were also assured that they should feel under no obligation to answer any question they felt uncomfortable about. It is very easy to make assurances like this, but can be very difficult to know whether they are understood and whether they have been effectively carried out. How do I know for example that they weren't inhibited from refusing to answer questions by the nature of the situation? In the event, one of the participants did refuse a question about his home life – this issue was not pursued, and I took it to indicate that the participants had indeed taken the assurances seriously. From my point of view, having willing volunteers is fundamental to the success of the project,

and no matter how strong the permission might be from ‘official’ sources, without the proper (and continued) consent of the children, it could not have proceeded.

4.4 Power relationships in the conduct of research

Aligning the study with habitus and the work of Bourdieu assumes a discussion of power, since power is wielded by those possessing the legitimated forms of capital ‘required’ by society in order to gain status. It is therefore important to discuss how power plays a significant role in the study, since power relationships are ever-present in the life of a child, and will feature strongly in any research project involving children. Robinson and Kellett (2004) give a stark example of this in their discussion of a Scottish Parliament decision in 2002. The Scottish Executive consulted widely over the proposal to ban smacking of children by parents (and other adults). While 90% of children consulted were opposed to smacking, because Scottish adults appeared not to support the proposal, it was dropped. So this discussion of power cannot ignore the background detail that children have grown up with their views being either ignored, or being sought and then ignored.

In the school setting, pupils taking their options in year nine are certainly consulted, and are allowed a degree of choice. But this is surrounded by a structure which allows only limited choice. This manifests itself in a number of ways: first, many schools guide option choice according to ability (as proxy indicator of performance) so that certain combinations of subjects are available only to selected pupils, as was the case in this project where only pupils from designated higher-ability groups were entered for the ‘traditional’ Science GCSE classes. In addition, the range of subjects available is strictly controlled by the government, so that English, Mathematics

and Science have to be studied. Only once the framework of options has been established are the children presented with their 'turn' at deciding.

The power relations are exacerbated by generational issues, whereby children are brought up to regard adults as 'other' and to be respected. These arguments then present problems for the researcher who wishes to gain the trust and respect of the young people with whom the research is being carried out – a respect which has to be earned and granted by the young person, not the kind of respect which is bestowed by the pupils' acquiescence. This affects the whole approach to the research project, and presents ethical considerations in addition. Inevitably, the researcher is in a position of power over the participants – in this case I was the individual setting the agenda, deciding the questions, recording the responses and interpreting their words and actions.

Power is inevitably exercised by the researcher – this is a power which is present for any researcher who is choosing the subject, methodology, participants, time scale, site and focus. Therefore I was concerned to provide the participants with a measure of control in the project by working closely on the research with the participants – involving them in aspects of the interpretation of the results, and in the way the research is conducted and presented, and by putting it in an appropriate context. For example, when I explained to them that I would be disguising their names in any reports I wrote, they were keen to find out the names I had used for them – which were open to revision by the children themselves. This could have been a sensitive issue, since the choice of names can be loaded with meaning. This is illustrated by Jasmina's reaction to her name. She describes herself as Indian, having as she puts it 'an Indian father and a Welsh mother', and was delighted with the name I had come up with- She did not want to change it, since her real name is also culturally aligned with Asian origins rather than European. If, as with Jasmina, names carry social and cultural overtones, getting them

right and then sharing them with the people concerned is an important part of the process of earning respect and sharing the process of research. We also spent some time discussing the outcomes of the research and my conclusions up to that point.

When research is conducted with, on, or about children, there are four perspectives identified by Christensen and Prout (2002: 480) from their observation of research:

- “The child as object;
- The child as subject;
- The child as social actor;
- The child as participant researcher.”

They acknowledge that the different approaches merge across the boundaries, but there are distinctive features associated with each:

The first approach assumes a position of dependence and incompetence in dealing with the information and situation being researched. The research will contain accounts from adults taken from adult points of view. As Robinson and Kellett (2004) suggest, there is an assumed need to protect the children and interpret their lives for them. The second approach, while being more child-centred, still carries judgements about their maturity and their ability to deal with the concepts being researched. Children in this approach might be considered incompetent if they have learning difficulties, or are very young.

The third perspective takes children as social actors with autonomous status. “This research approach does not necessarily make a distinction between adults and children and there is no automatic assumption that methodologies will need to be adapted according to age or that different ethical standards will apply” (Robinson and

Kellett, 2004: 86). It is this approach which most closely aligns with the methodology I have adopted. The reasons for this are partly the practical ones as mentioned above, but I also have to acknowledge the learning process of researching for a doctorate, in that an approach which shares much of the planning, methodology and interpretation with participants requires a confidence and maturity of approach which I did not possess when I started! However, describing the participants in this project as ‘social actors’ meshes perfectly with the purpose of the research, which is to study the processes which these ‘social actors’ use to negotiate their way through education and towards career.

The fourth approach involves children having an active role as participants in the research. There is a new, but growing, body of opinion which recommends this approach wherever possible. Indeed, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989) holds that children should be fully involved in decisions which affect all aspects of their lives, a point echoed by Tisdall, Davis and Gallagher (2009). The planning and development involved in the conduct of my research project would have made this approach very difficult to do, since much of the background to the work had been carried out in advance of the original approach to the school for access to the pupils.

Fraser (2004) does make the point that some research involving young people can be appropriately done *about* them where this involves for example a quantitative investigation of trends in young people’s services. In contrast, for a qualitative study eliciting the attitudes and understanding of pupils to their own position in society, an approach which involves them closely in the methodology is essential.

The methodology therefore needs to connect directly with the personal experiences and attitudes of the participants themselves, and I adopt the position that the participants are indeed competent to speak for themselves and to decide for themselves

whether or not to be involved with the research. Fraser (2004) asserts that the legal position supports the notion that children should be deemed competent to give their consent if they can fully understand the content of the research.

4.5 Is researching with children the same as researching with adults?

Morrow and Richards (1996) suggest that when comparing research with children and adults, there are key differences in the areas of vulnerability, competence, and power. While they argue that these issues are not absent in adult research, they are of particular significance when working with children.

It is possible to describe a range of vulnerabilities exhibited by children and young people which affect the relationship between participant and observer, as listed by Alderson (2005: 30)

- “ the innocent child needing protection;
- the deprived disadvantaged child needing resources and services;
- the criminal child requiring control;
- the ignorant child needing education;
- the excluded child who may need special shelter or opportunities;
- the disabled child who is the victim of personal tragedy or of a rejecting society; and
- the strong resourceful child who can work with adults towards solving problems and creating new opportunities”

In this project, the pupils demonstrated that they were able to ‘work with adults towards solving problems and creating new opportunities’, and so a methodology more closely aligned with an adult methodology is appropriate, while taking account of the risk mentioned by Punch (2002: 322) that ‘There has been a tendency to perceive

research with children as one of two extremes: just the same or entirely different from adults'. She also questions why it is necessary to carry out child-friendly approaches to communicate with them if they are to be regarded as fully competent? I take the point, but would argue that in any researcher-participant relationship there has to be a degree to which the researcher must support the participant's understanding of the process.

Children can be vulnerable because we have a culture of simply not listening to children's voices, or of treating them as in some way quaint and 'inherently wrong' (Morrow and Richards, 1996: 100). Children are often viewed as vulnerable because of their relative physical weakness or immaturity, but we can too easily fall into the trap of assuming that youthfulness equates to vulnerability and that researchers can forget how well young people can understand procedures and contexts of research which directly relates to their situation. This then raises the issue of competence, which has been raised in legal discussions over whether girls under the age of sixteen are legally competent to decide whether to seek medical advice over contraception. David, Edwards and Alldred (2001) refer to a case in which the House of Lords ruled that a girl of under sixteen should indeed be regarded as legally competent in such a case, which has far-reaching consequences both for the population as a whole and for the young person concerned. Participation in a research project such as this is far less significant, in that it involves no life-affecting decisions on the part of the participants, and I decided to interact with them as competent to discuss the topics in question.

Returning briefly to the issue of power, since it is central to the argument that young people's decision-making is strongly influenced by their social background, I as researcher exercise power, since "... the power to choose which standpoint or way of seeing lies with the researcher" (Morrow and Richards, 1996: 99). In the school situation, there are strong power relationships which can prevent children from making

decisions to choose vocational subjects over traditional subjects because those individuals who are able to exercise power over them (parents and teachers) often do this, in the interests of the child but without their full consent, because they see it as being in the child's own long-term interest. This returns us to the concept of competence – at what stage does the child obtain sufficient insight into their own long-term interest to be able to make a judgement which is appropriate to the child and the child's future? And at what stage can parental 'ownership' be withdrawn from the argument?

David, Edwards and Alldred (2001) attempted to address the issue of 'ownership' when conducting research into young people's attitudes to parental involvement. By their understanding of the competence of individuals to take part in research, they chose to go into schools to gain the permission of the children without reference to the parents (except when they were interviewing children in the home).

I also chose this kind of approach. While it is necessary to have the permission of a 'gatekeeper' to gain initial access to the children, it is the children themselves who make the decision to take part in the research. In this case the gatekeeper was a representative of the senior management of the school. He kept the governors and senior management team informed, but ultimately the decision rested with the children once the approach had been agreed.

While I have argued that a methodology more aligned with adult research is appropriate here, there are reservations about dealing with the generational difference. While it is true that all adults have experienced childhood, in the frame of a research project this is almost always with a big temporal gap, and in a different social and cultural configuration – in this case for example the education system was very different in the 1960s, when selective schools dominated, and the political drive to recruit from

across the social spectrum to Higher Education did not exist. Attitudes and pressures in society are also vastly different. But children's voices are still not heard sufficiently, and it would be fair to say that the same was true of women through much of the twentieth century. So is there something to be learned from feminist methodology which will help me develop an appropriate methodology for working with young people?

4.6 Methodology of data collection

My chief source of data for this study was the pupils themselves. This information is best obtained by interview, though children of this age can sometimes be unwilling to open up and give their views freely. The approach is broadly underpinned by a critical social phenomenological stance, within a power perspective. As Gray (2004: 21) says, "Phenomenology holds that any attempt to understand social reality has to be grounded in people's experiences of that social reality. Hence, social phenomenology insists that we must lay aside our prevailing understanding of phenomena and revisit our immediate experience of them in order that new meanings may emerge." He also goes on to point out that social phenomenological research is typically at individual level, relying heavily on interviews for data collection.

But social phenomenology on its own does not address the issue of power relations that structure the social reality within which young people make their decisions. So in this project there is a two-stage approach to the data collection and analysis, that reflects a critical, power position: the interview data are viewed both as reflecting young peoples' experiences, but also as being constituted by these experiences, and reflecting the particular social and power position the young people inhabit.

I set up interview groups of three pupils each – as Morgan (1988) points out, this would allow me to observe a certain amount of interaction on a topic and give the opportunity to explore pupils' attitudes to issues which they might not otherwise give. He also points out that focus groups are a particular strength when the researcher is investigating topics that otherwise might not be of interest to the participants.

Putting the interviewees into groups has a number of advantages and disadvantages. Morgan (1988) describes focus groups as a useful tool because effectively it allows the researcher to bridge between the individual interview and participant observation. By facilitating discussion, and feeding in well-prepared questions, hopefully the participants then embark on a lively conversation with minimal intervention from the researcher, other than to steer the discussion in a given direction. This however, was not the only purpose for using group interviews, and not all researchers would agree that they constituted focus groups. Rather, they had the features of individual interviews, with the advantage of reaching a greater number of subjects in a shorter time. Of course, there are the attendant concerns that each member provides less material, and that this material will be affected by interventions from the other participants. In fact, there are many different configurations by which data might be collected from groups of participants. Adapting from Newby (2010: 349-50) the range can be summarised with the following distinctive features:

- Paired interviews, which facilitate mutual support for a more open discussion of a sensitive issue;
- Group interviews, in which participants take it in turns to respond to the researchers questions;

- Focus groups, in which a record of interactions between individuals within the group is included – allowing an analysis for example of group dynamics involving domination of one party over another;
- Discussion groups, which might include voting on issues to enable the group to reach decisions – a coordinator will introduce a series of topics for the group to consider;
- Individual interviews within a group – useful in identifying situations where participants' viewpoints might be influenced by others.

All of these formats share the potential benefit of providing mutual support for the individuals concerned when considering the alternative of individual one-to-one interviews with a researcher. I chose to adopt a group interview approach, initially limiting the size of group to three in order to reduce the influence of one group member over another, while enabling an atmosphere in which the interviewer is not held to be too dominant. It is noticeable that some commentators regard focus groups as specifically concerned with the interaction between individuals, arising from the development of the technique in media research (Kitzinger 1994), and most would expect field observations to be carried out in addition to transcriptions of the conversations. I therefore prefer to avoid the use of the term 'focus group' since observations of group interactions were not included in the data collection.

4.7 Recruiting and selecting the participants

David, Edwards and Alldred (2001), working with pupils as young as primary school age found difficulty when presenting the research to potential participants before commencement of their research – by the time the interviews began, data collection had already commenced, and the relationship between the researchers and participants was

already being developed along the lines of participant-educator rather than participant-researcher. I wanted to avoid this dilemma, and opted for an approach which led to the self-selection of the participants and of the composition of the groups.

One of the aims of the project is to explore the decision-making process of pupils faced with the decision of whether or not to attend Higher Education, and then if so, which institution to attend. In 2006, approximately 30% of school leavers nationwide aged 18-19 were moving straight into Higher Education (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2013). Statistics from the school I studied suggested that most pupils in the higher ability band progress to University, and with Government targets looking for HE participation to increase, I wanted to include in my sample of participants a significant proportion of pupils for whom a decision to attend HE was a genuine issue and not a foregone conclusion.

The school operates a banding system in science, whereby pupils are placed into three ability bands according to a range of assessments carried out in year seven (movement is possible at the end of each year if results suggest that it is desirable). These measures include Cognitive Abilities Test (CAT) scores, results from key stage two National Tests, and examinations within the school. The children are banded in this way for science, but for other subjects they might be in mixed ability groups. I wanted to carry out the research with pupils who were likely to appear in the middle third of the ability range, since it is likely that new participants in Higher Education will come from this middle group. I therefore selected a middle-band science group as the participant group.

The selected class of year nine pupils was invited to participate in the research by their class teacher and in the absence of the researcher, after being given basic information around the research. This was designed so that the first impression these

pupils would have would be of me as a researcher – they did not see me in the classroom context, in which case they might conceivably have identified me as a teacher. Eighteen pupils volunteered, and these eighteen individuals became the research cohort. This number gave me the flexibility to rearrange the interview groups while ensuring the collection of sufficient data. Additionally, if any pupils chose to withdraw from the research at any stage, the project would progress.

After the first two interviews in year nine, the participants progressed to their GCSE courses. 11 of them went on to GCSE Double Award Science, and 7 took GNVQ science. The 11 in the GCSE group were interviewed towards the end of their GCSE course to investigate how their plans for their subsequent educational trajectory were progressing.

The eight male and ten female pupils of the original starting group chose the order in which they participated: at the beginning of each session in the first interviews, the class teacher invited the next group of pupils to step forward, each time taking three pupils in the order they volunteered. This ensured some degree of compatibility between individual participants, and no difficulties were observed concerning animosity or hostility within the groups. All groups contained at least one male and at least one female pupil. At stage two, all eighteen pupils were available to take part, and all did so willingly in the same groups as before.

Stage three was rather different, because by this time the pupils had spent two years in classes apart from one another, and the pupils available for interview had reduced to eleven: two male and nine female. I invited them to form into three groups, but the boys expressed a preference to stay together. We therefore agreed to set up two groups instead of three – one mixed (three female, two male) and one all-female group of six individuals.

Many researchers have carried out interviews in groups, and careful consideration of the composition of the groups is generally and justifiably held to be important (Newby 2010, Greig et al. 2013). However, self-selection of participants is a recognised technique (Hight 2003) and carries benefits as well as risks. The risk is that the groups could become unbalanced and work poorly together, but the benefits are likely to be seen in a greater feeling of control in the situation. This greater control is evidenced by the fact that all eighteen original participants were eager to continue into stage two with the same composition of groups, and that all of the participants still available were happy to do so in stage three. Transcripts demonstrate that all the groups contributed positively to the process.

The group interviews began with an explanation of the purposes of the research before recording began to give the participants a genuine opportunity to withdraw if they felt uneasy about continuing; in fact they continued enthusiastically in all cases. They were assured that they would remain anonymous throughout the process, and that no statements they made would be shared with staff at the school. They appeared to take these promises seriously, since the discussions did reflect their personal opinions of the school and staff, whether positive or negative. Once consent had been established, the interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Researchers such as David, Edwards and Alldred (2001), Farrell (2005) and Fraser et al. (2004) stress the importance of verifying the voice of participants with the participants themselves. By the time the interviews had reached the third stage, the pupils had moved on in their educational careers, and had new stories to tell. I used this as an opportunity to relate some of the conclusions that were emerging from the research, and recount some of their views from the initial interviews to establish whether they felt that my treatment of their contribution was fair.

4.8 Organisation of data collection

In the remaining sections of this chapter I will describe the nature of the data collected and the relevance of the data to the research questions. I then go on to describe the in-depth interviews with groups of pupils and with individual teachers, and finally I describe how the data from the focus-group interviews were analysed. First however, I describe the ‘field’ in which the study took place – in this case, the field is the school as situated in the educational system of the day against the background of the discussion on field in section 2.3.

Table 4.1 below indicates the schedule for data collection, which took place in the following three stages:

- Stage 1: six initial group interviews with groups of three pupils each;
- Stage 2a: six follow-up group interviews with the same groups;
- Stage 2b: four individual interviews with members of teaching staff;
- Stage 3: two sessions, each with a different sample of the original participants in groups;

All names in the table are pseudonyms. Where times are indicated, these describe the durations of the recordings. These interviews were transcribed verbatim. One recording suffered data corruption and field notes were used instead.

Table 4.1: schedule of interviews		
Interview	Participant(s)	Duration (minutes)
Stage 1: October 2006		
Group interviews with pupils in year 9	Annie, Becky, Chris	45
	Diane, Emma, Frank	30
	Gemma, Hazel, Ian	15
	Jasmina, Kate, Liam	30
	Mike, Natalie, Oliver	25
	Paul, Richard, Sarah	15
Stage 2: June 2007		
Group interviews with pupils in year 9	Annie, Becky, Chris	Field notes
	Diane, Emma, Frank	40
	Gemma, Hazel, Ian	25
	Jasmina, Kate, Liam	15
	Mike, Natalie, Oliver	20
	Paul, Richard, Sarah	20
Individual interviews with members of teaching staff (June 07)	Head of year	40
	Head of Physics	20
	Assistant Head	30
	Careers teacher (and Head of Widening Participation)	25
Stage 3: May 09		
Group interviews with pupils in year 11	Jasmina, Liam, Mike, Oliver, Paul, Tracy	30
	Becky, Diane, Emma, Gemma, Hazel	60

Stage 1 group interviews

Table 4.2 shows how the Research Questions were used to develop a framework for the group discussions. A series of ‘prompts’ (column two) were used to address the topic covered by the Research Question, and a further column shows how it was anticipated the discussion might evolve from each of these prompts by means of probing comments which would bring out more information. In the first group, the prompts and probes were kept fairly simple (as in Table 4.2). I have used the term ‘prompt’ to describe statements and questions which introduce a new topic with the aim of steering the discussion through the territory laid out by each Research Question. The term ‘probe’ refers to the questions and statements which sought to clarify and expand

the ideas presented as a result of the prompts. The first part of Research Question 1 presents an over-arching view of the pupils' encounters with the career-choice process, and all prompts address the issue of career choice in some way. Similarly, for these groups, in addressing Research Question 3, as well as talking to the teachers directly about their perceptions of the pupils, I wanted to ascertain how the pupils understood their teachers' perceptions of them (see follow-up to question 3.1 in Table 4.2)

Table 4.2: structure for stage 1 group sessions		
Research Question	Prompts	Probes
1. How do individual pupils understand the process of career decision-making, and what meaning and values do they assign to particular career paths?	<p>1.1 How much have you thought about the subjects you will be taking in year 10?</p> <p>1.2 Did you talk to parents/friends/teachers/others</p> <p>1.3 What is a career?</p> <p>1.4 Is it important to choose work which: Pays well? makes you (feel?) important? is artistically strong? Involves caring for or helping people?</p> <p>1.5 How important is information from parents/friends/teachers/others?</p>	<p>Do you see this year as an important one in deciding what sort of career you will have? (How) will your options affect your chances of going to College/University?</p> <p>What do they say? What would they say if you decided to be a nurse/doctor/plumber (etc)?</p> <p>What is a job? Have you thought about being a nurse/doctor/plumber (etc)?</p> <p>Which of these are more important to you?</p> <p>What other people have you gained information from?</p>
2. How do 'social class', 'gender' and 'ethnicity' underpin the pupil's decision making process, and to what extent are pupils able to understand and articulate this underpinning?	<p>2.1 What job(s)/career(s) do your parents have?</p> <p>2.2 Did they go to university or college?</p> <p>2.3 Is there anyone in the family that you want to follow?</p> <p>2.4 Is it important to go with your friends when choosing a subject?</p>	<p>Do they expect you to do the same? (see 1.2) Do you see yourself in the same sort of job? What about the rest of the family?</p> <p>What did they do there? Again, do you or they expect you to do the same? What do they do? Do you know how to get there? Have you asked them?</p> <p>What might that do to your choices? Would it matter if it meant you couldn't do your favourite choice?</p>
3. What are pupils' and teachers' perceptions of the institutional strategies to recognise and value differently their: a)academic dispositions and	<p>3.1 What is your strongest subject?</p> <p>3.2 What is your weakest subject?</p> <p>3.3a What information and guidance in choosing your Y10 options have</p>	<p>Do teachers treat you differently in these subjects?</p> <p>Have you been told this, or is there some more information you are looking for?</p>

prior academic achievement; and b) social dispositions.	you had from the school so far? 3.3b What information and guidance do you expect to get from the school while you are choosing your option subject?	
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The group interviews were also designed to elicit information about the participants' cultural and social backgrounds, including the status of qualifications achieved by various members of the family. I did not seek to corroborate this information through contact with the parents for two reasons – first, I did not want to undermine the participants' confidence in the process, and second, I considered that if they were unaware of their parents' previous education, it effectively demonstrated that that particular form of cultural capital was not present. Other questions sought to establish how and from where the participants might attempt to gain information about future education and careers – this is a social act, so it would indicate how they made use of cultural capital to develop their thinking.

Stage 2 group interviews

Table 4.3 shows how the prompts and probes in the second stage of data collection focused on career and educational aspirations. At first, I was looking to find out what sort of careers the pupils wished to pursue. In the discussions, their uncertainty in this area became quickly apparent, and time was spent discussing their future educational aspirations. This nevertheless helped to investigate the concepts of social and cultural capital as lived by, embodied and experienced by the participants. I did not expect them to be explicit about these concepts by any means, but by analysing their responses to prompts about qualifications (and the need to work towards qualifications) they are expressing ideas and formulating attitudes that reflect particular habitus, and illustrate their possession of certain types and amounts of cultural capital.

Similarly, conversations about relationships (with, for example, role models and/or other members of their circle of family and friends) indicates how social capital impacts on the participants' experiences.

Table 4.3: structure for stage 2 group sessions		
Research Question	Prompts	Probes
1. How do individual pupils understand the process of career decision-making and construct their position towards this process, and what meaning and values do they assign to particular career paths?	<p>1.1 Have you made up your mind about your options?</p> <p>1.2 Describe the activities the school organised to help you decide on your options</p> <p>1.3 Did you visit a careers fair</p> <p>1.4 What activities have you tried for yourself to find out information</p> <p>1.5 Have you made changes to your ideas (recap previous suggestions)</p>	<p>Are there any changes from when we talked earlier in the year? (if so, why?)</p> <p>Did teachers at the school help you make your decisions? Which things made an impression on you? Which things were less impressive?</p> <p>Who did you see? Why? What did you discuss?</p> <p>How have members of your family helped?</p>
2. How do 'social class' and 'gender' underpin the pupils' decision-making process, and to what extent are pupils able to understand and articulate this underpinning?	<p>2.1 Last time you said you were interested in a career in X. Has this changed? Why (not)? Or 2.1 Last time you said you did not have a career in mind. Has this changed? Why (not)? 2.2 Then same question re university/college</p>	<p>Who have you discussed this with? What was their advice?</p>
3. What are the institutional influences on this process, and what are the pupils' experiences of these influences?	<p>3.1 Attainment: are you doing as well as you expected this year?</p> <p>3.2 Has there been a change in your relationship with teachers as you have progressed?</p> <p>3.3 Have your decisions been your own?</p> <p>3.4 Have you taken it on yourself to look for information/ask questions?</p>	<p>Better? Worse?</p> <p>Influences and involvement from family, friends, other people?</p> <p>How have you done this?</p>

Stage 3 group interviews

I returned to interview again some of the pupils interviewed in stages 1 and 2 after a gap of nearly two years, once they had almost completed year eleven. I met with ten of them and we sat down and discussed the project so far. We discussed possible ways to conduct the interviews, and as a result of this we formed two groups of five, a choice which emerged as a preference from the children themselves. In the event, one of their friends (named in Table 4.1 as Tracy) also asked to be included, and we all welcomed her contribution. Therefore, there was a group of four boys and two girls, followed by a group of five girls. The interviews were intended to move towards the form of focus groups, with prompts from me designed to provoke discussion. There were some lively exchanges in these sessions, though at times it was necessary to prompt further responses through direct questioning. The schedule of questions was formulated on the basis of the earlier responses I had from stages one and two of data collection. I also wanted to allow scope for the topics to develop in directions determined by the participants. I wanted to cover the social and cultural relationships they were developing, and my interest therefore focussed on how the participants related to the possibility of working towards Higher Education, and if this was the case, how they and their families were preparing differently for this step forward.

4.9 Collection of supporting data

Concurrent with the first interviews with the pupils, individual interviews were held with those teaching staff who were involved in the options selection process at the school. These comprised senior staff with overall responsibility, class teachers, careers teachers, and those with responsibility for pastoral care of year nine pupils. In total there were four interviews. Once again, staff members were invited to opt into the study, and interviews were recorded. At no time did the adult participants decline to

answer any questions. These interviews were designed to elicit information about the institutional processes which impinged on the pupils' decisions, as expressed in Research Question 3. Table 4.4 shows the interview schedule for the process, which covers the formal procedures carried out by the school in supporting the pupils through the options selection process, and the methods by which pupil targets were determined.

Table 4.4: structure for stage 2 interviews with teaching staff		
Research Question	Prompts	Probes
1. How do individual pupils understand the process of career decision-making and construct their position towards this process, and what meaning and values do they assign to particular career paths?	1.1 Describe the processes which the school puts in place to help the pupils choose their options at year 9	Influences from staff? How do these vary from class to class? Are pupils 'steered' in specific directions?
	1.2 What criteria do children use to select their options/careers?	Has this anything to do with the situation/education of their parents/carers?
2. How do 'social class' and 'gender' underpin the pupils' decision-making process, and to what extent are pupils able to understand and articulate this underpinning?	2.1 What influences are evident when children make their decisions?	Friendship groups? Family? Teachers? Careers service? Anywhere else? Has this anything to do with the situation/education of their parents/carers?
	2.2 Do gender, class, ethnicity make a difference?	How can you tell? If they do, why do you think this is? What does the school do about it? Has this anything to do with the situation/education of their parents/carers?
3. What are the institutional influences on this process, and what are the pupils' experiences of these influences?	3.1 How do you view the students as a year group?	How do they compare academically & socially with previous years?
	3.2 What are their attitudes to work and (including homework)?	
	3.3 Do any groups stand out as special (good or bad)	What makes them stand out? Has this anything to do with the situation/education of their parents/carers?
	3.4 How effective is careers guidance at the school? Outside the school?	What is the govt policy driving this?
	3.5 Is it necessary to target certain groups of pupils?	Are there some pupils who are 'beyond help'?
	3.6 What are the characteristics of a 'high flyer'?	

Finally, there is a certain amount of quantitative data which has been used to support the information supplied by the pupils in the interviews. The Fischer Family

Trust provides a statistical analysis of attainment data based on various measures of pupils' backgrounds. In the event, conclusions drawn from the analysis of this data proved to be highly significant.

Descriptions of the options selection process were available through documentation, and I was able to use these to compare with statements made by participants where appropriate (for example when recalling the range of subjects available to them).

4.10 Analysis of interview data

Transcribing the interviews

This is a time-consuming process which involves repeatedly listening to the interviews, and studying sections where the sound was indistinct very carefully to be sure of the identity of the different speakers. I had asked each interviewee to name themselves at the beginning of the interview to aid this process. It can be very difficult to identify individuals in a group with five girls, so it is important to make field notes and references to identity throughout the interview. Therefore many of my questions are prefaced by phrases like "Gemma, you said earlier that..."

This process has a significant advantage over other methods of transcription such as voice recognition software. As Alexiadou (2001) points out, the researcher becomes very familiar with the data. By the time I had reached this point, I had conducted the interviews, transcribed them word by word, analysed the meaning of every individual phrase, and as one of the participants commented when I was interviewing them in stage 3 "you know me better than I know myself". The point was that I had spent many hours studying the data, and was able to recall accurate details from our discussions of two years previously.

It was tempting during the transcription phase to take a number of significant extracts to see if they began to suggest where the focus of the study might lie, and while I was able to practise my interpretation of these in informal discussions with other researchers, I was wary of ‘over-analysing’ the data and also of seeing interpretations and meaning that were not fully justified. It is possible to make a premature judgement concerning the links between the data at this stage because this involved the selection of a sub-set of the data. Therefore I set aside these considerations until I had completed the data coding in its entirety.

Coding the data

Drawing on the work of Auerbach and Silverstein (2003), I worked through the transcripts and field notes looking for individual phrases and passages which could be grouped together.

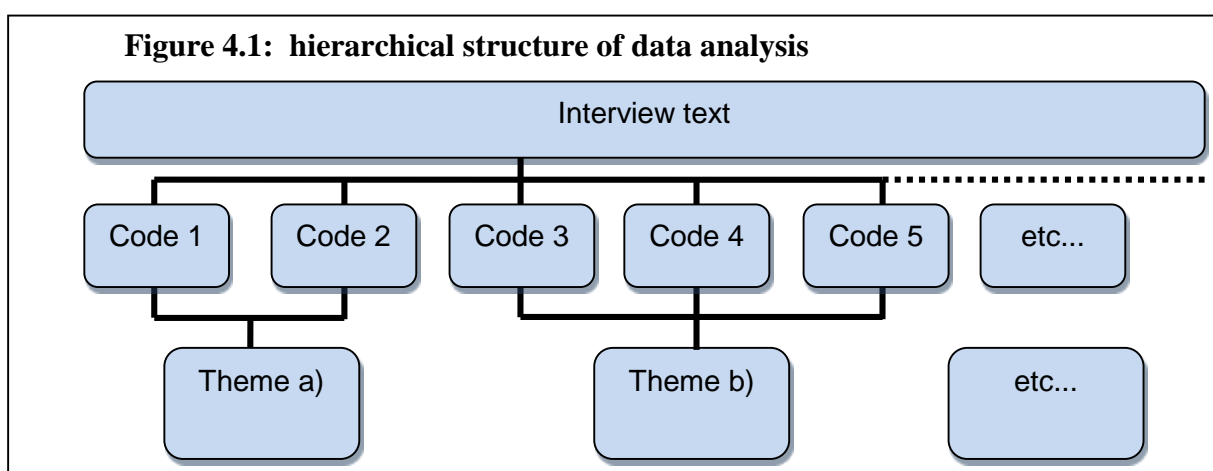
There is some variation in the way researchers use the terms for the individual units of coded data. Saldaña (2009), reviewing writers’ interpretations of the term ‘theme’, concludes that, while there is variation, nevertheless a theme can be regarded (p. 139) as a “phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means”. He goes on to recommend reducing the number of themes into an overarching theme that “weaves various themes together into a coherent narrative”. He also points out that themes emerge from the coding, rather than being an entity that is coded itself.

Rubin and Rubin (2005: 56) on the other hand, use the term ‘concept’ to describe “core ideas that can be summarised as nouns, noun phrases, or gerunds”. They go on to suggest that ‘themes’ can be built up from individual concepts where they are linked by a common thread. However, the use of the word ‘concept’ is unhelpful as it will cause confusion when discussing the ‘concept’ of habitus.

I chose to express the hierarchical nature of the analysis by using the term ‘code’ to mean a unit of data which can be described by a simple phrase or sentence, and the term ‘theme’ to describe the larger-scale ideas emerging from grouped codes.

The codes were now grouped into ‘themes’ around how the participants had voiced their experiences, rather than around the questions I had asked in the first place. This placed the data into a hierarchical structure, which is described in Figure 4.1 below. It reduces down from the many individual words and phrases comprising the transcribed text, through a smaller quantity of codes and then to a manageable number of larger themes.

Diagrammatically, this can be represented as in Figure 4.1:



The diagram shows that the data analysis is a hierarchical process, where first a large body of text (the interview data) is broken down into a reduced number of codes and then grouped into themes. Data coding is therefore a multi-stage process leading to the construction of themes, in the series of stages below:

- Transcribing the interviews;
- Studying and sorting extracts;
- Searching for codes;
- Clustering data into related codes;
- Grouping codes into ‘themes’;
- Constructing an account for each theme.

Each of these stages is now described in detail.

For each transcript, I took the first line and chose a code title which seemed to describe best the underlying meaning. For example in the first interview, one of the participants comments that they ‘don’t want to go to university because it is too expensive’. I pasted this extract into a separate table entitled ‘financial considerations’ and then worked through the whole transcript searching for phrases with the same meaning, highlighted them, and copied them into the table.

This is illustrated in the short extract below (Table 4.5) from one of the interviews in stage 1. These codes are assembled into table 4.7 below; for example the highlighted sections suggest a code relating to career choice, and were given the code title of “future careers” (code 22 in Table 4.7).

Table 4.5: Extract from interview showing highlighting of codes
<p><i>I: what did the school organise to help you with your options?</i></p> <p>J: an options evening with a booklet – it told you what you were going to be doing in the subjects.</p> <p>K: the options evening was helpful because it like explained what it was about – if you went to somebody they explained what the thing [subject] was about</p> <p>J: they kind of explained how much it would cost [how many GCSEs] and how much work you’d have to put in. It helped me make my mind up about the subjects.</p> <p><i>I: has it helped with choosing a career?</i></p>

J: I haven't a clue what I'm going to do ... I want to go to college anyway

I: is that through pressure from your parents?

J: no, I want to go – not because they want me to, but because I want the excitement of it.... My mum and dad said that they had good years there, so I thought well I'll have a go as well. I can't think of what I'm going to be when I'm older so I might as well pick another option and go to university.

K: I don't want to go to college because I'm going to go straight to the airport because I want to be an air hostess ... because my dad knows this person [a flight attendant] I'm going to be taught what to do ... how to apply ... and I'm going for work experience ... my mum's found somewhere to go – a travel agent's

L: I haven't a clue what I'm going to do ... I'll go to college and university but I haven't a clue what career

I: K:, you've seen through your dad's friend what a What do they call them ... flight attendant?

K: don't know

The use of a computer speeds up the process – the highlighted text was 'greyed out' (so that it is still visible), and I then proceeded to highlight the next appropriate unit of data as code 2. By repeatedly greying out the already-coded data, I completed the extraction of all units of data into a new document, which listed and referenced the data code by code (summary in Table 4.6 below). At this stage, the source of the data and its position in the interview are recorded to enable cross-referencing if required.

Table 4.6: Interview data grouped into codes		
Code	Lines	Phrases from Stage 1 Interview 2
Financial – funds needed for University	68	<p>Frank: I'm going to college and that, but I don't know whether I'm going to go to university because of the money and that cos if you get a loan and stuff like that it takes you ages to pay it off.... It depends what I feel like... I might do but...</p> <p><i>Do you feel you might earn more so you could afford to pay it off</i></p> <p>Frank: I suppose yeah, but if you get in & don't earn enough then</p>
Perceptions of ability	<p>7</p> <p>132</p> <p>148</p>	<p><i>Why History?</i></p> <p>Emma: I like it more than Geography and I'm better at it</p> <p><i>What are your strongest and weakest subjects?</i></p> <p>Diane: strongest is RE going on test results even though it's the most useless subject anyone could ever need but when I had a test I got a really high mark, and I enjoy the lessons as well</p> <p><i>If you enjoy the lessons it can't be that useless can it?</i></p> <p>Diane: Yeah but it's not really much to do with jobs unless you want to be a priest or something.</p> <p>Diane: My worst subject is Maths</p> <p>Emma: my strongest subject is Maths and my weakest is probably science..... er no PE...the teachers treat me just like any other teacher, but I'm just not very good at itin Maths they just treat me normally, but I'm good at it so I feel like I want to try hard at it, but when you're not good at it you feel you don't really want to try</p> <p>Frank: my strongest subject is Art and my weakest is RE</p>

I repeated this process for all the interviews with the pupils and adults until I had the codes identified in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7: Titles of codes from interview data			
1	Financial – funds needed for University	18	Work – Women
2	Grades for university	19	Ethnicity
3	University – destinations	20	Disability
4	University – perceptions	21	Role models (Influences from other people)
5	Perceptions of ability	22	Future careers
6	School work	23	Quals needed for career
7	School – social	24	Family at University
8	School – support	25	Family careers
9	Teachers’ attitudes	26	Subject choice
10	Liking subjects	27	Choosing with friends
11	Parents’ attitudes	28	Behaviour
12	Class & income	29	Sources of information
13	Class – definitions of	30	Predicting the future
14	Class & family	31	Perceptions of teachers
15	Social life	32	Restrictions of choice
16	Career	33	Staff training
17	Careers – women (Gender Issues)	34	Policy considerations

Grouping codes into ‘themes’

Having analysed each interview in this way, the number of codes had grown to 34, though not every code was represented in each interview, and new codes that had not been evident in earlier interviews emerged as I worked through all the transcripts. I then assembled all the codes together so that all instances from each interview were clustered together in one table. Two of the codes (33 & 34) emerged through the interviews with the adults, and concerned issues which did not emerge at all in the pupil interviews. They were however invaluable in giving an understanding of the way the field of the school was constructed by the education professionals.

While carrying out this analysis, it was sometimes necessary to move items of data from one code to another if the meaning of the piece of text fitted better a different code. Individual sections of text were occasionally coded a particular way because of their presence in a conversation about one topic, but in isolation fitted more closely elsewhere. This is both the strength and purpose of this technique of data analysis – by

breaking the data into individual units, it is possible to identify relationships between codes and themes that are not obvious on the first reading. I therefore looked through the codes confirming that they had sufficient data to allow for meaningful analysis, and generally this was the case. Codes 19 and 20 were rather short, but covered topics that did not sit easily elsewhere. Code 18 contained little data – either referring to the way women undertake school work, in which case it fitted in code 6, or to women in the world of work, in which case it fitted equally well into code 17. I redistributed code 18, and therefore the data divided into a total of 32 codes.

Reay et al. (2005: 12) describe how their transcripts were “open coded initially but as analysis proceeded, coding concentrated on the major emergent issues and allowed us to saturate our main hypothesis concerning the relationship between habituses and choice.”

Similarly, I concentrated the codes into themes which would reflect the participants’ encounters with field and capital through their habitus. Seven themes emerged from this process, centred on the educational fields of school and university, and on the participants’ attempts to make use of social and cultural capital. These themes are summarised in table 4.8.

School is a ‘lived’ field which the pupils are currently experiencing, and the pupils’ habitus, embodied from their everyday life at home, influences the way they are able to operate within the school. Research discussed in earlier chapters points strongly to the suggestion that some young people are better equipped for dealing with the rules and expectations of the middle-class culture of the teacher-dominated classroom than others.

University on the other hand, is an ‘imagined’ field – the participants are not in a position to have encountered university (or employment) in a truly realistic way. Some

describe trips to university, or periods of work experience, but these experiences are heavily managed and do not correspond exactly to the experiences they will have once they encounter them for real. Therefore the participants must necessarily speculate upon what the experiences will be like for them, and imagine themselves in them. When discussing these fields, their opinions will be strongly affected by their cultural and social background. This is not intended as a deterministic argument, which would predict certain modes of behaviour from certain participants - merely an observation that some of these speculations will have been acted out in the family and at school, and thus they have very little else on which to base their reactions. So the social and cultural fields occupy both lived and imaginary spaces; for example the participants use their experience of social interaction in the home and at school to arrive at an interpretation of the imagined field of career and education. Their interpretation is bound by the experiences they have had so far. Most of the cultural capital they possess at the time of the interviews is in the form of capital invested by their families, and will be evidenced by the existence of qualifications and status in the careers of their parents and (sometimes) their siblings.

Data from the staff interviews were included within this analysis, as they provided valuable information to illuminate the field of the school. Where existing codes were not sufficient to describe a unit of data, new codes were introduced.

Table 4.8: Theme titles		
Codes	No	Themes
Themes relating to RQ1 and the pupils’ perceptions of their future educational and career trajectories.		
Financial – funds needed for University	1	Encountering an imagined field: university
Grades for university	2	
University – destinations	3	
University – perceptions	4	
Career	16	Developing cultural capital: preparing for career
Careers – women (gender issues)	17	
Future careers	22	
Qualifications	23	
Predicting the future	30	
Themes relating to RQ2 and the pupils’ emerging perceptions of class and gender.		
School – social	7	Making use of social capital with peers
Class & income	12	
Class – definitions of	13	
Social life	15	
Ethnicity	19	
Disability	20	Investment in forms of capital within the family
Class & family	14	
Family at uni	24	
Family careers	25	
Themes relating to RQ3 and the pupils’ encounters with the school and the school’s efforts to set progress targets.		
Parents’ attitudes	11	Developing social capital working with adults
School – support	8	
Teachers’ attitudes	9	
Role models (Influences from other people)	21	
Sources of information	29	
Perceptions of teachers	31	
Perceptions of ability	5	Encountering a lived field: the school
School work	6	
Liking subjects	10	
Subject choice	26	
Choosing with friends	27	
Behaviour	28	
Restrictions of choice	32	

4.11 Data analysis, including supplementary data

Documentary evidence was collected from the school, and included the documentation handed to pupils as they encounter the Options Process. This enabled me to confirm for example the chronology of events.

A noteworthy additional source of data proved to be in the form of numerical grade estimates supplied by the Fischer Family Trust based on the Trust's analysis of performance data provided by the school. The school used the grade estimates to establish targets for each individual pupil in each subject and at each key stage. The method used by the Trust and thus adopted by the school revealed important information about where the school's priorities lay in setting individual targets for the pupils. This had a significant bearing on the pupils' experience of the school since these targets were used to inform decisions about pupil progress, and the likely ability of pupils to follow their chosen courses.

The themes in table 4.8 have been grouped around the three Research Questions, and these illustrate the three areas of data analysis: pupils' perceptions of career and educational trajectories, and the influences of their social background in forming these perceptions; pupils' social encounters with their peers and with adults at home and in school; and the influences brought to bear by interactions with the social construct of the school. These themes have been interpreted through Bourdieu's concepts, so that individual events have been identified where habitus and capital come into play.

This approach also holds good for the analysis of data from the Fischer Family Trust (FFT), because such data reveal the mechanism by which the school evaluates and values cultural capital. By viewing this alongside the decisions which the individual pupils are making, we can see how differences emerge in the ways in which these decisions are taken, and in the ways in which the individuals respond.

Chapter five

The research in context

5.1 Introduction

The following four chapters present the data analysis, and throughout I refer to the pupils who took part in this work as ‘the participants’. The adults (all staff at the school) who were interviewed also participated, but I prefer to refer to them by their role within the school management structure. Wherever the pupils are quoted in the text, I use the pseudonyms referred to in Table 4.1. Where teaching staff at the school are quoted, I use the titles listed in Table 4.1

Chapters six to eight deal with each Research Question in turn. As each Research Question is considered, data from relevant themes will be discussed to illustrate the findings. Before considering the Research Questions, in this chapter I provide contextual information by describing the operation of the options process at the school, and background information relating to the participants, including their social classification according to Roberts’ (2011) scheme reported in section 2.5 and based on the occupation of the families’ main earner(s). I also record the university education (where present) of other members of the close family (parents and siblings) as a proxy indicator of the cultural capital possessed by each family. This approach mirrors that followed by Reay et al (2005).

The research takes place in a Catholic Comprehensive School at the edge of a large prosperous town in the North West of England. As a faith school, the intake of approximately 1200 pupils is drawn from all areas of the town, and includes a high proportion (over 25%) of non-Catholic pupils. Non-Catholic pupils include other faiths as well as Christian, (e.g. Jewish and Muslim), although the numbers are very small.

There is a sixth-form, and while the majority of the annual cohort of about 200 generally progress to sixth-form study, approximately half of these attend the local sixth-form college situated across town. This college sets high selection criteria, and many of the most able pupils apply for a place, rather than choosing to stay on at the school. Therefore the sixth-form at the school is under-subscribed, and runs A-level courses to relatively small classes, along with a range of vocational courses at level three. At the time of the research, the town had five other 11-16 Comprehensive Schools with which the research school competes, and one of these schools was under threat of closure due to falling roles. During the two years of the research, the school was in a fiercely competitive environment, and its very existence depended on maintaining a strong reputation. Partly because of its faith status, this reputation was indeed strong, and the school remains slightly over-subscribed. In 2001, the school had gained Technology College status, and this resulted in improvements to the school environment through refurbishments of Science and Information Technology teaching areas. These improvements helped to maintain the school's popularity in the town. Retention and attendance at the school is very good, with a small turnover from year to year. Because the school is the only faith school in the town, and thus the intake is from all areas of the town, there is a good demographic mix which is representative of the town. The school was regarded locally as high-achieving, and roughly 75% of pupils gained grade 5 at key stage three in English, Mathematics and Science, with a similar number achieving five GCSEs at grade C and above. This placed it in the top 25% of schools of its type.

5.2 The options process

This section describes the stages through which the pupils are taken during year nine of their schooling. At the time of the study (2006-8), this was the academic year

during which pupils took their key stage three National Test, and their decisions are made against the background of preparation for the Tests. The timetable below (Table 5.1) is relatively short and simple (see also the extract from the information booklet, annex 5) in that there is one evening around March to which parents and pupils are invited. Here, information about the range of courses on offer in year 10 is given to pupils and parents.

Table 5.1: key dates in the options process			
Date	Event	Purpose	Comments
Early March	Invitation to parents' evening	List available options.	This is the first formal opportunity to view the options
Late March	Parents' evening	Provide information to parents and pupils	Details about possible combinations are confirmed, and the process for completing Option Choice forms is described.
April	Option deadline	Pupils complete their choices on the Option form	
May	National Tests	Decisions relating to options are made after the results of the Tests.	
July	Year 10 options confirmed	Notification is sent to parents and pupils	

However, decisions are made as soon as the pupils arrive in year seven which will have a significant impact on the options process when they are placed into three bands based on performance at key stage two. The three bands are set out as in Table 5.2:

Table 5.2: ranking of pupils into bands	
Band	Rank
F	Most able – high performing
H	Middle ability
K	Least well performing
Note that each band may have two or three classes referred to as F1, F2 ... etc, which may or may not indicate a further level of ranking.	

This is described by the Head of Year Nine:

Head of Year: [referring to assessment lists]...key stage three, we're talking bands now...when they come in from year 6 ... at the minute now... we get all the raw scores in from primary schools and put them into three bands: two mirror bands and we take the bottom 50-odd and put them in the 'K-band'

When the pupils reach the end of year nine, they are again ready to be moved into two new bands for year ten, based on their performance in the key stage three National Tests, when slightly more than half the pupils are placed in the high-achieving band ('band F'):

I: so the whole school is ranked from 1-200 [approx intake is 200 per year]*

Head of Year: yeah, the cut off is about erm 110, something like that... 115...

(* note that the interviewer is referred to throughout as 'I', and quoted in italics.)

However the highest-achieving pupils in band H (the middle band) are placed in a group called H1, which in this case ranks above the equally-ranked H2 and H3:

Head of Year: obviously that's something we have to take on board – it's the Assistant Head Teacher's job to explain to the parents and whatnot ... obviously there are one or two difficulties ... obviously we've got one case of a lad who's quite able who's underachieved but is it fair on the others? It's a tricky one. The only fall back in a way is that H1 can be put into GCSE Science – they do GCSE Science – after the last Ofsted we made sure that happened. So even though they're on the vocational pathway they do GCSE Science.

So pupils in band F and group H1 are placed in classes for the ‘traditional’ GCSE Science award, whereas the remaining pupils are placed in classes which go through a vocational course, as the Head of Physics describes:

Head of Physics: they don’t get to choose Science at all, it’s done by setting arrangements so the F-band all do the GCSE along with the first set in the H-band, and all the other kids do OCR national, which is a vocational course.

I: and they have no choice at all about that?

Head of Physics: no

Further restrictions of a similar nature are placed on the pupils, in that those in band F are able to choose mostly from the more traditional GCSE style of course, whereas the options available in band H focus largely (but not exclusively) on vocational courses. Because there is such a significant implication surrounding performance at key stage three, I now explore how the school goes about supporting pupils as they progress through that key stage.

5.3 “I’ll get there if I want to”: Pupil Background Information

Table 5.3 shows a summary of data gathered through discussions about the participants’ family backgrounds and their career aspirations at the time of asking. Social class is listed using the four-point scale from Roberts (2011), discussed in section 2.5, using information on parental occupation (column three) as provided by the participants. According to this classification, the participants are more or less equally divided between the middle, intermediate and working classes, with one participant from the underclass on the grounds that her parents were long-term unemployed. As an indicator of cultural capital, attendance at university by members of the family is denoted by bold print. Five of the pupils came from families where one or more member had a university degree, and all of these five families were either middle or intermediate class. To indicate engagement with social capital, column 4 shows the

sources of information used by the participants in developing ideas about suitable careers. Column two lists the career aspirations declared at each of the three interview stages (where they were present – 6 were unavailable in stage three). Only one (Kate) had the same aspiration throughout. Column four indicates where information and inspiration originated for their career aspirations – mostly this was from within the immediate social circle of family and friends, and indicates the availability and use of social capital. By the end of stage three, all except Kate, who had firm plans for her career, had indicated a firm interest in attending university.

Table 5.3: pupil background information

Class in column 1 is referred to as M (middle), I (intermediate), W (working) or U (underclass)
(after Roberts 2011:21)

1. Name (class)	2. Career choice stated in each interview phase	3. Profession of parents (bold represents attendance at HE)	4. Source of inspiration for career choice	5. Ambition for HE
Annie (W)	1. Teacher or psychologist 2. no comment 3. absent	Mum= care worker No pressure F=absent	Sister does psychology	Yes – English
Becky (W)	1. Model – journalist to fall back on 2. no comment 3. doctor	'you are going' (step mum) Mum= TA F=joiner (absent)	Lots of people suggesting it	Yes
Chris (M)	1. Policeman (or builder/plumber if not grades) 2: pharmacist; 3. absent	M=school admin F= IT consultant	Cousin is a pharmacist	hopefully
Diane (I)	1. Fashion designer 2. no comment 3. own business	F=restaurateur M=housewife Wanted to do hairdressing but parents wouldn't allow, ditto catering course	Big brother at college Friend is a fashion designer	Yes 'it's what my parents want' Don't really know whether I want to
Emma (M)	1. police 2. no comment 3. Accountant	M=careers adviser F= marketing manager Strong influence	Sister at uni, teacher training	Not stated
Frank (I)	1: don't know 2: run own business like grandfather & uncle (building?) 3. absent	Grandparents, retired, ran plumbing firm	Grandfather & uncle running own business	1: No (financial) 2: yes – been there, liked it.
Gemma (I)	1. Don't know 2. 'famous' 3. PE teacher	F=financial adviser M=housewife	None	Yes – I'll get there if I want to
Hazel (M)	1. Something with children 2. no comment 3. teacher	M=police (maternity leave) F= police Inspector Encouraging	Cousin = teacher; Aunt=nursery nurse	1: Not thought 2: yes
Ian (W)	1. Physiotherapist 2. physiotherapist 3. absent	M=mechanic F=office worker	Friend training at uni	Not stated
Jasmina (M)	1. travel, 'help people' 2. still travel 3. photographer	F=technician (runs own workshop) M=teacher Pressure and encouragement	Wide family network, inc cousins about subject choice	yes
Kate (W)	1. Flight attendant 2. no comment 3. Flight attendant	F=builder M=cleaner	Father's friend=flight attendant	No – straight into airline ("always wanted to be a stewardess")
Liam (I)	1. Lawyer 2. haven't a clue 3. don't know	M=nurse F=customs officer	None given	Brother & sister both gone Like to go
Mike (M)	1. Artist or art teacher 2.ditto 3. don't know	M=F=art teacher	Parents	Yes – loads of pressure from parents
Natalie (U)	1. Something with animals – not social work (bad experience) 2. child psychology 3. absent	M=F=unemployed	Friend = hairdresser Has seen a child psychologist	1: not sure 2: would like to go because of trip
Oliver (M)	1. Accounting or business 2. accountant? Not a doctor 3. dentist	F=own business (swimming pools) M= bed manager (hospital)	Father's own business	Not stated, but career choice implies yes.
Paul (M)	1. Maybe a chef 2. scoffed when reminded 'could be a pilot'; 3. don't know	M=F=podiatrist	Doesn't know any chefs	Yes
Richard (I)	1. Not a clue, maybe in a suit 2. no comment 3. absent	F=absent M= pharmacy assistant (formerly chef)	None given	Not stated
Sarah (W)	1. 'famous' 2. actress 3. absent	M=builder F=housewife	Has an agent (sister's friend) Connexions interview (SEN)	Probably – parents encouraging

Chapter six

“I’m scared I won’t be able to do it”: perceptions of career paths

How do individual pupils understand the process of career decision-making and construct their position towards this process, and what meaning and values do they assign to particular career paths?

The codes and themes grouped together for this chapter all relate to the pupils’ perceptions of the educational trajectories which might propel them towards specific careers. This includes discussion of their understanding of career and education as concepts.

The question is concerned with how the participants view themselves in the fields of career and education. This view tends to be restricted to that which is available through their social backgrounds, and some demonstrated not only their lack of knowledge of these fields, but also a degree of uncertainty about how and where they should proceed.

For example, Becky comes from a family with a background that has no involvement with Higher Education. Her father is a joiner and her mother is a teaching assistant – neither has been to university. She refers to both her mum and her step mum at times, though does not appear willing to discuss this in the interviews. During stage one, she demonstrates uncertainty about the future:

Becky: When you were our age, were you scared about what was going to happen, and did you?
Cos I think now, I want to be a journalist & I’m scared I won’t be able to do it.

Becky: it scares me to think that when I’m older you’ve got to support your own family like Chris said, and buy your own house, cos now, you live off your mum and her money, but when

you're older you've got to do it all on your own and it scares me so I want to get the best I can get.

[stage one focus group]

Her lack of exposure to and relations with adults who are in high profile occupations underpins her lack of confidence to visualise her future as either a journalist or, as the second quote above suggests, an autonomous adult.

Becky's responses were very much tied to the information she had been able to get, whether this was through the school or through using her own resources drawn from social encounters and social/family networks. . Similarly, Diane's choice of career is driven by the fact that there are people in her family who have done the same thing:

I: Diane, do you still want to be a fashion designer?, and what makes you think you'll be good at it?

Diane: Yeah, I've picked textiles because I want to help with sewing ... well I've got some of my family that do it and they were saying how good it was when they went to Milan and stuff and then, like I really enjoy just drawing designs and stuff like that already.

[stage two focus group]

Here Diane refers to the fashion design industry through the most fundamental of tasks (sewing) and then immediately talks about the Milan fashion scene – right at the other end of the industry spectrum with no apparent sense of the sharp pyramid of the fashion industry, with many workers at the 'cut-and-sew' phase, and very few indeed who are able to draw and realise designs.

The other aspect of 'career' which was of interest to most of the participants was the reward – but this was not always expressed in financial terms – liking a job was an important factor too. First of all, Chris came up with a useful distinction between 'job' and 'career':

Chris: a job would be a part time thing, but if you were committed to it it would be a career.

[stage one focus group]

Here, the reference to ‘part-time’ can probably be extended to include ‘temporary’. Even in the current economic climate whereby no job can be regarded as permanent, a career is seen by young people as a long-term commitment. In the interviews however, we tended to use the terms interchangeably. Most expressed a desire for one or both of job satisfaction or financial reward, though also linked the rewards to hard work:

Mike: ... I don't really care what salary I just want to get a good job in my own time so I don't have hours to work

Oliver: big salary. And be happy

[Stage one focus group]

Gemma: Men [i.e. adults] work hard – my dad is so hard working... he's a financial advisor and now he works hard, but when he was at school he didn't. [Diane: yeah, same here –]

[Stage three focus group]

Only one of the participants had received any formal careers guidance from a service such as Connexions, and their responses show similar patterns to those described by Blenkinsop et al. (2006), who found that pupils receiving limited guidance tended to rely on information from within the family. They also describe how pupils' decision making tended to change frequently, which is also the case with the participants here. As noted in chapter five, only one maintained the same ambition throughout the two years of the data gathering.

Since the participants have never been to university, and in some cases have no experience at all to draw upon, they must imagine what it is like. They use whatever information they can for this – but this is often at second or third hand (where other family members have attended university). Even when the encounter is first hand (one of them had been on a trip to a university for an overnight stay), it is not exactly like studying at university – for exactly the reasons described by Delpit (1997) – in attempting to be welcoming to all comers, some institutions will tend to under-

emphasise aspects relating to work and study, and over-estimate the aspects relating to social enjoyment. Prospective students whose family backgrounds have not included attendance at Higher Education institutions were more likely to misconstrue this imbalance and perceive university as a place for play:

Frank: I don't just want to go to university for the degree – it's an experience – obviously I want to get the degree and that, but I want to go for the partying and that and it'll be a good laugh

[stage two focus group]

There is a clear difference in the ways that the individual participants refer to university. These differences are apparent over time as the participants mature and construct new interpretations which represent knowledge about their prospects and about what studying at university involves. Thus most of the participants in the early interviews demonstrate a great deal of uncertainty and reticence; these extracts are all from stage one:

Diane: Is it difficult to get to uni?

Frank: don't know about uni – because of the money.

Hazel: haven't really thought about uni

[stage one focus group]

A few months later, and some of this reticence has gone since the participants have been forced to think about their futures while going through the process of choosing their options. For example, Frank has been on an orientation trip to a university and is no longer concerned about the financial implications:

Frank: I suppose you will be earning more after uni and can afford to pay the loan.

[stage two focus group]

Others regard university as a gateway to higher earnings:

Annie: cos I want to have a good future

Paul: get a degree to get a better job

[stage one focus group]

After a gap of almost two years, the participants have been through their GCSEs and are much more aware of the next stage of their education, as well as becoming more articulate and focused as they have matured. What is most noticeable here is not whether or not they want to go to university – very nearly all of them do – but where they see themselves going.

Emma: I want to go far away (my sisters did)

Hazel: I want to go to Leeds

Jasmina: as far away from here as possible

[stage three focus group]

Emma, Hazel and Jasmina are the only three participants who express any interest in a destination away from their current home; all three have close family members who either are attending, or have attended, university. Therefore university is a topic they have encountered in their home life, and while they must still imagine how they will be positioned in the field, they have confidence in their ability to ‘fit in’. For Emma, Hazel and Jasmina, attending university is not a choice at all – it is what they expect (and are expected by their families) to do. As also noted by Reay et al. (2005), *not* attending university would be a considered choice in their cases, whereas for the other participants, this lack of information leads them to regard attendance at university as a choice they will face. So Emma, Hazel and Jasmina regard the choice as *where* they will go, not *whether* they will go.

Mike too has parents who went to university, and while the destination he talks about is nearer at hand, he articulates his reasons early (his parents are both Art teachers):

Mike: I want to go to Liverpool because it’s got a big art centre.

[stage one focus group]

Contrasted with this are the responses of Gemma, Diane and Paul:

Gemma: I actually want to go to [names nearest university]

Diane: I don't really want to go to university to be honest Well, I've never been an academic sort of person ever... I'm going to college but I'm doing... catering college...

Paul: I want to stay near home. You go there and you don't know people; if you stay near you can always come back.

[stage three focus group]

All three come from families where knowledge of Universities only comes from third-hand accounts, and general assumptions and readings. With no member of these families having attended University, pupils express a lack confidence with the idea of stepping out too far from that which is familiar; and, in the particular cases, this means either staying close to home, or deciding not to go to university at all. This is not to say that these young people lack ambition or direction – Becky's ambitions developed strongly towards a career in Medicine. She is recognising that the value embodied in A-level qualifications will not be sufficient for her to gain a place on a course in Medicine – she must obtain other, sometimes social, experiences which institutions will value and reward as they would suggest attributes which the institution would regard positively (leadership, team working, interest in citizenship or sporting activities, etc.). These attributes strongly suggest particular forms of cultural capital that are gradually built and generated through years of voluntary activities in the years before applying to University courses.

On the other hand, by stage three Diane has become implicitly aware of the relative values of her qualifications and social position, and recognises the inherent disadvantage she has already experienced:

Diane: it's that whole 'grade A, class 1' thing we did in media ... it's unlikely that a family who consists of not very well paid jobs to have a child that attends Oxford ... [interruption]...

they ['rich people'] can afford to be clever – they can get tutors and stuff can't they [Gemma: from an early age] on the programme Gossip Girl because they want to get into Harvard and

because of her family history and because of who they are it gave her an advantage and she got in

[stage three focus group]

In these statements Diane very consciously refers to elite institutions as exclusive through the high academic and social standards they set that can only be met by early and systematic investment in the form of tutorials and other similar preparatory work. She recognises that Oxford and Harvard are ‘special’ in some way – that they carry more esteem than other universities which offer equivalent courses and qualifications; also that privilege enables the employment of tutors in order to gain access that she will be denied. Diane, whose parents didn’t attend university, has already talked herself out of the possibility of applying to high-status institutions, though she suggests that she would feel comfortable being part of that environment if she were to attend:

I: is uni a strange place with strange posh people? Diane, are there people like you at University?

Diane: yeah – that wouldn’t be a problem at all.

[stage three focus group]

However, her aspirations are clearly limited by the concept that extra tuition of the sort that would enable her to obtain a place at Harvard or Oxford, is clearly something that ‘others’ are able to obtain, but not her.

It is hardly surprising that young people of this age have often little or no idea of their future careers. Only six of the eighteen were able to identify a single career intention with any degree of consistency, choosing the same one in each interview. The other twelve took positions which varied from complete ignorance:

Frank: “I really haven’t a clue”

[stage one focus group]

... to a vague choice between two unrelated professions such as pharmacy and the police (Chris, Table 5.3)

There are many reasons for this, not least of which is the time period – the participants tended to regard the next seven years as a considerable time span, and only one (Becky) expressed any concern about the future, worrying that she might not be able to cope with providing for herself.

The most striking trend to emerge from the interview data concerned the source of career ambition and information. Rather than using professional advice from within the school, advice came almost exclusively from role models within the wider family network, and this was especially the case where the career aspirations were more firmly considered.

For each of the six who had a fairly consistent career intention, there was a member (or friend) of the family who was already in the profession and in a position to offer advice and guidance. This is a clear example of the cultural and social capital already invested in the family being used to the advantage of the individual. When discussing role models, the participants were clear that they looked to the families first, and that teachers could only be of qualified use.

Hazel: [my role model is] my cousin. She did exactly what I want to do and went to uni ... she does like teaching (she went to University X) she did what I want to do ...

Emma: My dad [is a role model for me]

Diane: you only see the PE teachers in your school don't you – you don't see them from other places so you don't know what they're all like sort of thing so she's only really got three PE teachers to look up to hasn't she?

[stage three focus group]

The reference to media and sport personalities tended to focus on how unrealistic it would be to make use of them as role models.

Becky: ...it depends what job you want to do though, because if you want to be like a footballer with loads of famous role models, it's easy, but if you want to be erm like a scuba diver [laughter] or an archaeologist you'd have no one so you'd research it wouldn't you?

[stage three focus group]

Emma, who had expressed an interest in running a business, was asked if she'd like to copy the contestants on TV's 'The Apprentice':

Emma: ooh no ... I hate [names a contestant] just wants to please everybody she's like a robot

[stage three focus group]

Other participants, while vague about their intentions, were nevertheless clear about the nature of the work they expected to do – whether office work, fashion designing, or running their own business. Once again, they were generally able to refer to members of the family network who worked in similar professions, for example running their own business. These young people expected to do the same, though the doubt was in the fact that they were unsure what sort of business to run.

A few of the participants had limited ideas about their future, and tended to veer between extremes:

Natalie: I'd like to be a hairdresser as a backup, but if I can get the grades I'll be a vet

Becky: My English grades were worse than I expected this year and I wanted to be a journalist. Now I might try medicine

[stage two focus group]

All interviewees were positive about the advice and guidance given by the school insofar as it helped them in their subject choices, but with one exception they denied having received any direct careers guidance, either through a school programme or through subject study.

Only one of the interviewees (Sarah) had received an intervention from the Connexions service, and members of the focus group were unaware of why this might have been. In this case the intervention had been successful, as Sarah, who hoped to

become an actress, now had an agent and was active in local dramatics.

All interviewees were adamant that their friends had not influenced their decisions:

Kate: “one of my friends wants to do the same thing, but that’s because she wants to do the same thing”

[stage two focus group]

So the interviewees were leaning heavily on the family for support, and if that is the case, the influence from the family has been there from a very early age, which suggests that when the school brings in advice of its own, this advice must compete with the attitudes and values which the individual has grown up with – the people who are likely to make best use of advice may well be those whose families have already invested in cultural capital themselves (by the accumulation of university degrees for example, or by living in an area with a ‘good’ school).

Bricheno and Thornton (2007) reported a range of role models which excluded education professionals but included a significant proportion from the celebrity arena – a category that was all but absent from the pupils in this survey. Celebrity role models serve a different purpose – lifestyle and fashion are significant, but all but one of the eighteen participants regarded celebrity with scepticism when considering a realistic career (for example, see Emma’s comment above).

While most participants felt that the age of thirteen is probably too early to think about their careers, all were giving careful thought to the direction of their future education and expected it to continue beyond the age of 18. Where they had an idea of what they would like to do for a career, this was invariably based on some experience they had shared with a role model from the wider family network – sometimes an elder sibling, but equally often a cousin or friend of the family. They had seen this person in the career, and could picture themselves on the same path. Thus the cultural capital

invested in the family is being used by the next generation. The Widening Participation agenda seeks to improve participation in Higher Education by people from disadvantaged backgrounds. But this analysis unsurprisingly suggests that the disadvantage is self-perpetuating because of the difficulties encountered by young people who try to generate their own cultural capital.

Reay et al. (2005: 62) and Vryonides (2007: 880) refer to ‘familial habitus’ to describe how individuals repeatedly follow the practices and dispositions of their families. However, as Atkinson (2011) suggests, this reduces the significance of Bourdieu’s argument, because Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is relational – it concerns the individual’s interactions with the multiple fields of family, education and society, and therefore the interactions observed here are not those of the family but of the individual. I would argue that even though individual pupils have the agency to construct new versions of habitus through their actions and decisions, they are at the same time constrained by habitus in ways that shape both the limitations and the possibilities for transformation. This was demonstrated by one participant in particular, who began to deal proactively with a progression towards a career in Medicine.

The participants with strong evidence of transferable cultural capital in the family were better able to visualise a future with themselves in the centre, either going to university, or travelling around post-university seeking a role in life. The opposite was true for those with weak capital – Becky feels more secure with a role most linked to her current subject strengths, and she recalls this in the last interview:

Becky: I think I wanted to be a journalist because I was quite good at English.

[stage two focus group]

By stage three however, Becky comes across as a much more confident person – this is partly due to the maturity she has gained over two years, but the confidence manifests itself in interesting ways. She is learning to identify on which attributes

Universities place high value, and which are required in order for her to progress to that level of study. Bourdieu always understood that individuals could display ‘agency’ – in other words, act for themselves in ways which seek to change their status. He makes the point though (Bourdieu, 2004) that conversion of economic capital into cultural capital requires, in addition to actually having the economic capital in the first place, the further economic capital which enables the individual to spend the huge amount of time required to make the conversion.

Becky’s ambition is now to become a doctor, and she is well aware that this will require more than just hard work at exams – she needs experience, and she needs to learn new practices that she can’t learn at school or at home:

Becky: I’m doing voluntary work for the British Heart Foundation [who told you to do that?] for the Duke of Edinburgh, but I’ve carried it on now [not part of d of e any more] ... but in the summer holidays I’m doing work experience with disabled people and stuff [Hazel: that’s boss] there’s a teacher in the school who I can talk to if I can’t talk to my mum, he’ll give me advice and stuff. Sometimes you have to go and look for help cos your parents might not know enough.

[Stage three focus group]

She is therefore aware that she has the capacity to change her trajectory, and she shows this awareness in relation to her positioning within the classroom and in relation to the other students and to teachers:

Becky: If you get into higher band and you’re one of those who always talk and stuff ... if you’re in higher band then you change cos you’re with people who want to do well.

I: does the school change the way it looks at you then?

Becky: to a certain extent, yeah. Now I’ve started to work hard, teachers ... I’ve got quite a good reputation cos they know me as someone who works hard.

[Stage three focus group]

‘Working hard’ appears strongly in working-class ideals for self-improvement, but it is also a disposition rewarded by the school. Through her determination to

progress and her commitment to acquire what are necessary attributes, she has recognised that other dispositions need to change also:

Becky: I just think of a doctor and then I think of myself and try and be that and match that, and I'm constantly looking at myself and trying to prove it.

[Stage three focus group]

She is not making this effort without support from the family – indeed, she shows a recognition and admiration for the sacrifices made by her mother to enable her ambition to become a doctor:

Becky: ... my role model's my mum... she's not a doctor or anything but she's worked to get where she is, and she's a single parent and she's like she supports herself and she always pushes me to do that

she says don't rely on a man – get on with your own business .. work. She's a single parent and she's worked her way up... she's not the cleverest, she didn't go to uni but she does like degrees for her work.

[Stage three focus group]

It is clear that Becky is benefiting from some home influence to enable her to progress. This is consistent with Siraj-Blatchford's (2010) study into how the home learning environment influences future success in school. The study shows how children whose backgrounds would otherwise be described as disadvantaged, or at least under-represented, in Higher Education (judged from outcomes of other children from the same socioeconomic background) can succeed in the education system. The largest contributing factor was the quality of home learning environment, where the child's learning was supported by focused activity from an early age. It is clear from Becky's response that she is used to the idea of progressing in her education because her mother has constantly encouraged her.

Summary

In shaping their ideas of future education and careers, the participants are constrained by their family environment, and consistently show dispositions which match their social background. Those from families which have already invested in cultural capital (through parental attendance at university for example), were more relaxed about exploring the possibilities of travelling across the country to attend university. Those without this family experience had to rely on such experience of these concepts as they were able to glean from their families and friends, and these experiences were more limited. This resulted in 'safer' options such as choosing a university close enough to home so that they could easily return if they felt out of place.

All pupils had high (and realistic) *aspirations* for their future, but the middle-class pupils were more adept at setting realistic *expectations*.

Chapter seven

“I’m middle class – it’s the work ethic”: perceptions of class and gender

How do ‘social class’ and ‘gender’ underpin the pupils’ decision-making process, and to what extent are pupils able to understand and articulate this underpinning.

In this chapter the pupils’ perception of their own social background comes into play in shaping their decisions.

While the ‘decision-making process’ here refers to the process of choosing an education and a career, the pupils make decisions all the time about situations, and these decisions will be strongly influenced by their social background – class, gender, within those, by the social and cultural capital they are able to harness in making these decisions. I begin the analysis by discussing aspects of social capital as encountered within the family, and then continue by discussing social interactions between the participants and their peers, followed by interactions between the participants and other adults.

Some of the participants will be more successful at all aspects of social engagement than others, and Bourdieu’s use of habitus as a concept demonstrates how some forms of cultural and social capital are of significantly more benefit than others. Thus some families are far more successful at investing capital in their children to enable them to encounter these imagined fields when the time comes to enter them in adulthood. Bourdieu viewed this as a mechanism by which the dominant group, that is, the section of society which allows or denies privilege to other groups, was able to maintain its dominance and protect membership of the dominant group for its own members. People outside the dominant group therefore face a dilemma – in order to

obtain the privileged status enjoyed by the dominant group, they must either transform their habitus so that they 'belong', or they must remain outside the group and therefore lose out on the benefits they might otherwise gain.

The evidence that parental influence is passed down through the family is presented by a number of the participants – here Diane explains how her father has gone into business in the same way as his own father:

Diane: he's [her father] following in his dad's footsteps, his dad did the same but with fudge factories and stuff and then it's been passed down, and then my dad, like wanted me to do well, but I've always got the safety net of going into the family businesses

[stage two focus group]

Phrases like 'following in his dad's footsteps', 'it's been passed down' and 'going into the family business' are all examples of the investment of cultural capital from one generation to the next. Throughout the next couple of passages we see these themes repeated by all of the participants quoted here. Hazel, Gemma and Diane take this up in one of the stage three focus groups:

Hazel: I think you work better with people of your own kind.

I: do you mean people from the same background?

Hazel: I think that's got a lot to do with it as well.

Gemma: It depends what your parents are ... I'm middle-class – it's the work ethic.

Diane: if your parents are coming from, like, not very well paid jobs or they've not been very academic, ... you always follow most of the time what your parents do. Cos if your parents don't encourage you to ... you're not going to be academic, and plus the money thing ... if they didn't go to uni they're not gonna ... a lot of the time 'oh let's go to uni and pay for it' ...

I: so somebody's middle-class even if they don't get paid very well ... because they work hard

Gemma: if they've got good morals...

[stage three focus group]

They acknowledge the investment of time and money that must be made, and in effect what they are perceptively acknowledging is that the investment of economic

capital is required just to create the opportunity to develop cultural capital. Diane is effectively saying that people who lack the economic capital to make this investment will not be able to build up their cultural capital.

All the participants advocate the importance of parental involvement one way or another. Although Oliver does not acknowledge a great deal of pressure from his parents to work towards university, he's exclusively talking about his family's involvement with education and how he wants to emulate or better it:

Oliver: my brother and sister went, so I kind of like want to follow [they can do it so I can do it]

I: Do your parents want you to go to uni....did they go?

Oliver: I haven't asked... I think they wouldn't mind....my mum, she's at uni getting a degree now [nursing] and my dad didn't go to uni cos he was a joiner before he started his business

I: Do you think they'll encourage you to go?

Oliver: yeah, they'll say it's good, that you'll learn a lot

I: Do you have a network of family & friends?

Oliver: me mum, cos she's doing it now....my dad, he's doing well for himself now but he didn't go to university....I'm the eldest (got younger brothers & sisters)... my other two aunts went to uni as well but that's about it....I've got an older friend ... who's taking GCSEs now

[stage three focus group]

His answer to my question about a network of family and friends is focussed very much on his family first. He doesn't regard his peers at school as belonging to that family network. Sarah's father is a builder, and she obviously feels that he has done well for his family, because she has a scornful attitude to the kind of lifestyle which would see her in council accommodation. She does not necessarily see education as a means to achieving this, since her father 'brings enough money in' and her mother 'doesn't need to work'.

I: Do you have a big family?

Sarah: yeah, fairly big.....my dad's a builder and my mum doesn't have to work.... Because my dad brings enough money in..... I think I might go to college, I'm not too sure about university it just depends how much education I need to do what I want to do

[stage one focus group]

Sarah: I want to be famous ... I've got to be famous... I don't want to be landed with three kids and a council house.

I: what do you live in now?

Sarah: I don't live in a council house! In [names local village] with my dad – it's good – it's not a trampy area! Who'd want to live there – acting or modelling or singing is what I want to do – I'm not going on the dole, that's right out.

[stage two focus group]

Sarah's response is in accord with Skeggs' (1997: 74) of "disidentifications of class", although most of the participants acknowledge a strong connection with their families' culture of beliefs, values and conduct. This is clearly expressed by Jasmina, for whom it is important not to 'step outside her culture' – by which she is referring to her Muslim heritage (even though her parents are not intending to arrange a marriage for her, she still refers to the 'rule'):

Jasmina: my dad comes from a large family with arranged marriages and he wants me to make my own mind up because he married a Christian woman and they don't believe in arranged marriages so he won't make me do anything ... I want to go to university to meet new people ... I'm not stepping outside my culture by doing that at all. My mum converted into a Muslim so she understands the rule

[stage three focus group]

All of these observations link the participants' aspirations back to their families, and therefore are necessarily classed in their formation. Their responses suggest a need to retain contact with that which is familiar, and rejecting changes which would significantly change their current habitus. Despite some evidence of disidentification of class, they are displaying similar attitudes to those observed by Archer, et al. (2007), in

which young working-class people had a very strong sense of their classed identity, and saw the maintenance of this identity as paramount. Attending university would be inconsistent with the financial input needed for the fashion items they required for their identity, and thus they were unwilling to shed this identity in order to attend university.

Aspirations broadly match those of their parents – there is very little talk from the participants of parents whose expectations are too demanding. The nearest we get to this is from Emma, who acknowledges pressure from her parents, but the pressure is as much applied by herself as she competes with her elder sister:

Emma: I want to make my parents proud, and kind of outdo my sisters, and get to that day when I've got my degree and I've got my life ahead of me

...

Emma: my whole family weren't that successful, my mum went to university, but my dad had problems with his mum, and he got kicked out when he was 16 and he never went to university and he always resents that, but he was always successful, because he moved his way up and he really resents that fact so that he always pushes and pushes and pushes us to get to university cos he could never go.

[stage two focus group]

This contribution from Emma is significant – there is evidence here of a transformation of habitus within the family. She talks with admiration of the way her father has 'moved his way up' after rejection from his own family. How did he achieve this? It is instructive to look at the contribution of Becky, who alone in the group has a somewhat different view of her prospects:

Becky: people who have rich parents lack the motivation whereas people from poorer families with no qual's want to do better so they have more motivation and that's how they do it.

[stage three focus group]

Becky had developed a realisation that first she must achieve better qualifications than her family in order to progress. Her contention that those with rich

parents 'lack the motivation' is revealing – while in her eyes the middle-classes may appear to lack motivation, they are still able to access greater privilege because of their dominant position and Becky must apply herself to gain that privilege.

The following observations concern the participants' perceptions of society and the fields of education and work. Towards the end of the project, their views matured noticeably, and they were able to sustain longer and more coherent conversations. They showed a significant degree of concern for and knowledge of a range of issues, and while much of their opinion is somewhat idealistic, it is nevertheless grounded in serious consideration.

The following extracts all occurred in stage three. In the first part of the conversation, we are talking about the concept of 'poshness'. It is clear from the conversations that the term is being used by pupils as a proxy for income, and they use it as a relative term, so that the word 'posh' effectively means 'wealthier than me'. (It is interesting to note their understanding of the concepts of both poshness (which also carries connotations of class) and wealth – they use the two terms interchangeably – and most of them (but not all) regard me as posh:

Hazel: If sir [me] wasn't posh, he'd have brought small bars of chocolate, but because he's posh he brought big bars of chocolate [*I brought chocolate to thank them for helping*] ... little things like that make someone posh. [Stage three focus group]

In the other focus group, the participants pick up the subject in a similar way in that they too use it as a mildly derogatory term also related to income.

Tracy: It's [Oxford] too posh! [*I: too posh?*] yeah [general agreement]

[Tracy: interrupts:] Like Freddy off big brother innit? He went to Cathedral School and all that.. he went to Oxford or Cambridge

Mike : [agrees] ... so they're all snobby, whereas at a normal university you'd be just as good...you'd just be like normal people.

[Stage three focus group]

Here, Mike and Tracy also equate ‘poshness’ with ‘snobbery’ – and the thought of attending a university such as Oxford would make them feel out of place, whereas the contestant in Big Brother had been to Cathedral School and therefore would fit in. This is a very clear recognition that they feel that their social background is inadequate to prepare them for that university, whereas Mike refers to all other universities as ‘normal’ (in other words, places where he feels he would feel that he belonged). Archer et al. (2007: 231) refer to their own and others’ observations that “young people perceived higher education as being for ‘posher’ and ‘cleverer’ people...”, and the wording here reinforces my point that the terms are being used in a relative sense.

I then pursued the idea of ‘poshness’ further to see how they all placed themselves:

I: do posh people have an advantage to get to Oxford? [all say yes]

Emma: all my sister’s friends are posh

I: am I posh?

[Hazel: yes, I’d say yes. Gemma: no]

Emma: you’re not posh but I think you have a lot of money

Diane: you’re a very well educated man I’d say

Emma: I don’t think you were born posh

Gemma: especially with that tie!

Hazel: I would never have bought a tie with atomic numbers and protons on it!

Gemma: you don’t act like a posh person

[Stage three focus group]

Emma perceives that I have a lot of money – perhaps because of the large bars of chocolate, or perhaps because they thought my tie was a little eccentric! Clearly the participants recognise the importance of dress and fashion (see Archer et al. 2007), and Bourdieu repeatedly stresses the importance of the embodiment of cultural capital, and that habitus is an embodied concept. So it is not surprising that another seemingly

trivial detail of dress is the focus of their opinion of one of their fellow pupils (not present) – they fail to see the irony as they play out a process of legitimization on the social capital presented by “Martha”:

Emma: people can act posh and not be very posh for example people like Martha [name of girl] acts like she’s posh but she’s not posh at all

Diane: she’s NOT posh! ... Martha is quite clever, and she thinks she’s posh

Emma: Martha’s a girl in our year and she comes in and she’s like ... she gets her hair up with one clip and she’s like a mother with like really annoying clothes ...

Hazel: ... and she thinks that she’s better than everybody else but she’s actually not and she’s not posh at all

Diane: I like her

...

Diane: I said to someone ‘why doesn’t she wear tan because she’s got white legs’ and that’s when someone said she couldn’t afford it and I knew she’s not as rich as she makes out.

Hazel: instead of a plain hair clip she has to have a diamante one

[Stage three focus group]

They have noted her displays of social capital (hair style, dress sense, demeanour) and decided that she cannot belong to their social circle – she is not good enough for them. In the same way however, when they refer to universities such as Oxford and Cambridge, they regard the people there as ‘posh’. This process of legitimization is covered extensively by Skeggs (1997), and refers to it in a variety of contexts, at institutional as well as personal levels. Institutionally, the term refers to the acceptance or rejection of the symbolic value of cultural or social capital. At a personal level it is exemplified here as the rejection of their friend’s form of dress, which is an expression of cultural capital.

The above extract is also an example of a gendered response, and throughout the interviews, the participants demonstrated gendered positions on issues relating to careers. There is a great deal of work about gender in education which recognises the

strongly gendered nature of classroom interaction, and there is not space to go through a large amount of it here. However, some consideration is needed in order to make sense of the passages below. O'Donnell and Sharpe (2004) refer in particular to 'macho' behaviour from teenage boys in groups which is designed to impress upon their peers that they have the masculine credentials to be a strong member of the group. The trenchant and sometimes extreme views – particularly (but not exclusively) from the boys would seem to support this:

Ian: I want to be a physiotherapist ... I watch sport quite a lot, I like it when they run on the pitch and stuff and sort out the players – also if one dives, you just say 'oh get up you girl'

[stage two focus group]

Ian's focus group contained Hazel and Gemma (see Table 4.1), and according to the analysis above Ian felt the need to express his masculine side in front of the girls.

For the boys, these views did not appear to change significantly by the time we had reached stage three, and in fact were, if anything, more forcefully put, but the girls were much more articulate in responding:

I: do men have an advantage in the job market?

Paul/Liam: yes

Liam: if I was hiring for a job [he has discussed running a building firm] I'd rather have a man than a woman [indistinct & load discussion – some agreement, some dissent]. For a secretary, I'd hire a woman.

I: does it matter if you're male or female?

Mike: no [Oliver: sometimes]

Mike: you can't imagine a big hefty woman walking around a building site...

[later]

I: Mike, you said anyone can be what they want, but you don't see women being builders...

Mike: I didn't say they couldn't, I said they didn't want to be, that's my point

Paul: you can't have one driving a plane can you?

Tracy: I can!

Paul: you get female air hostesses

Tracy: Apparently we don't get directions, that's the most stereotypical thing isn't it?

Paul: if you're on a plane, you can't see a woman walking in, to be the pilot!

[stage three focus group]

This exchange also reflects a point made by Francis (2000): that when some young people talk about the prospect of performing a role traditionally associated with the other gender, they refer to a need to become like that gender. So the woman who wants to be a builder must be 'big and hefty' like a man, according to Mike. Although Mike subsequently tempers his opinion and backs down somewhat after the reaction from the girls, implying that it's not that women wouldn't be able to do manual work, it's just that they wouldn't want to. However Paul and Liam make statements which most women would find offensive, Paul referring to a stereotypical cliché about women drivers.

The other girls in the group were as shocked as Tracy at these views, although they did show a tendency towards a gendered standpoint:

Becky: I don't see a girl being a builder, I mean... if a girl was a tomboy, then if that's what she really wants to do, then so be it but I wouldn't like to be a builder either.

[stage one focus group]

However the girls certainly expressed confidence in their ability as women:

I: is it different for girls to get to university? Or more difficult?

Gemma: just as many girls go as boys – and it's just as easy – we'll get there if we want to.

[stage three focus group]

They also believed that their position in the job market is strong:

Emma: women have an advantage anyway, cos when they apply for a job they were treated as inferior in the past and now they're getting more women into business and they tend to take women over men. They try to get more women in.

[stage three focus group]

Their faith in the fairness of the system may be unfounded – according to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2009), there are still significant gaps in the appointment and salaries between women and men in most high-paid professions. However, the girls were capable of highly gendered language as well:

Hazel: you know when they do an interview? It depends whether the one doing the interview is a man or a woman. Cos if there's only a man, and he's straight, and the woman's a bit sexy, she'll have an advantage.

I: I guess that might be true [stop recruiting one gender if there is an imbalance] in a primary school where there are more women

Hazel: that's because it's nurturing

[stage three focus group]

So most of the participants have tended to assign (or at least imagine) future roles to themselves which are gendered in nature. The data in Table 5.3 suggest that there may be a degree of cultural reproduction here, since the vast majority of parental roles (where identified) appear to be along traditionally gender-stereotypical lines.

Summary

The participants demonstrate that they are learning to operate under the rules which apply symbolic value to cultural and social capital. They are aware of the possibility of transformative action, but feel that there is a limit to the transformative action they are prepared to take (for most, Oxford University is 'too posh'). They are willing to judge the social and cultural capital of their peers, and are similarly aware that they are subject to the same judgements by others.

Chapter eight

Targets which meet or exceed expectation: institutional influences on the process of options selection

What are the institutional influences on this process, and what are the pupils' experiences of these influences?

The setting of performance and attainment targets by the school is a highly significant institutional influence, and impacts heavily on every pupil's progress. The process proved to be surprisingly complex, and at the time of the research, the school made use of data analysis by the Fischer Family Trust to assist the school in developing targets for individual pupils. The process by which these targets are produced provides an insight into how school priorities influence the individual grade expectations of each pupil and requires some detailed exploration. In the first stage, I describe briefly how the analysis is carried out by the Fischer Family Trust, before going on to discuss the ways in which this variously affects the individual pupils. This is an area of research which has not been reported elsewhere.

8.1 From data to estimates: the Fischer Family Trust

The Fischer Family Trust (FFT) provides a service to schools by taking performance data from pupils when they enter schools and, comparing this information with national data sets,

“develop models which could be used to provide estimates to support schools and LAs in the process of setting targets for these new indicators [of good progress]”

(Fischer Family Trust, 2011: 2)

The FFT offers this analysis in four different modes (which they label A-D). In the simplest mode (A), pupils' prior attainment (at key stage two) is matched with other pupils of the same gender and age who have achieved a similar pattern of attainment in previous years. This takes into account the observations by the Trust that pupils tend to perform better if they are born early in the school year, and that prior performance in English Mathematics and Science correlates with higher achievement generally at key stage 3 and 4. Thus for example, where it is found that 60% of pupils with a particular attainment profile went on to achieve a particular grade at GCSE, it is assumed that all pupils with that profile will have a 60% probability of achieving that GCSE grade. This is repeated for each pupil in each subject at each key stage. The FFT analysis is improved by three progressive refinements through modes B, C and D.

With mode B, the following socioeconomic factors are taken into account, referred to by the Trust as 'school context' (Fischer Family Trust 2011):

- Percentage of pupils eligible for FSM;
- Geodemographic data using pupil postcodes;

In mode B, pupil results are compared with performance data from other schools with a similar demographic background. Note that the socioeconomic background of individual pupils is not taken into account here. The outcome of the mode B analysis enables the school to set targets for its pupils which will match the attainment of other, similar, schools. Modes C and D extend the analysis to enable the school to meet targets negotiated with the Local Authority to demonstrate significant improvement, and to elevate the school into the top quartile of schools regionally and nationally. The modes are summarised in table 8.1:

Table 8.1: Modes of analysis used by the Fischer Family Trust		
Adapted from Fischer Family Trust (2011)		
Mode	Basis	Comments
A	Pupil prior attainment and gender	Does not use socioeconomic data
B	Pupil prior attainment, gender and school context	‘School context’ refers to demographic data (pupil postcodes) and %free school meals.
C	Use Type B and then take into account improvement needed for national or locally negotiated local authority target	All estimates are skewed upwards to meet negotiated targets
D	Use Type B and then adjust to ensure it is consistent with ‘top 25%’ of schools (value-added)	All estimates are skewed upwards to provide the targets which would place the school in the upper quartile on performance.

Note that modes B-D make use of demographic data, but only in respect of the whole school. It is the school’s choice which of these modes is used. This school used mode D – in other words, the senior management of the school had taken the decision that the school should aspire to the top 25% in the country when assessing value-added performance.

Significantly, the background of individual pupils was not taken into account when arriving at an estimate for that individual – demographic data was used only to set the global target distribution for the whole school. The outcome of the process is a probability factor for each pupil in each subject relating to the grades they might achieve at each key stage. The final step in the process identifies the attainment which must be achieved by each pupil in order that the school is able to reach its targets. At this point the analysis reveals some startling anomalies between subjects, shown in table 8.2 below.

For the pupils in this year group, the school had targets for level 5 at key stage three in English, Mathematics and Science of approximately 87%. With a cohort of 198 pupils, this required for example, 172 pupils to achieve level 5 in Science. This target was selected for the first 172 pupils in the ranking list. According to the data tables from the school, the probability that the 172nd pupil in the list would achieve level 5 (or above) was 0.63. Below this “threshold probability” value, pupils were not expected to achieve level 5. Table 8.2 shows the threshold values for English, Mathematics and Science:

Table 8.2: threshold probabilities by subject for the achievement of levels 5 and 6 (N=197)				
Subject	Threshold probability for level 5 and above	No of pupils estimated for achievement at level 5 and above	Threshold probability for level 6 and above	No of pupils estimated for achievement at level 6 and above
English	0.72	174	0.63	108
Mathematics	0.50	173	0.61	131
Science	0.63	172	0.68	115

Table 8.2 shows a significant difference between the threshold probabilities, particularly between English and Mathematics. This demonstrates that it is not directly pupil ability which was being considered here in determining the pupil target grade – it was determined instead by the school’s requirement for a particular number of pupils to achieve a level 5. It seems that the English department’s target is rather more lenient, since all 174 pupils required to achieve a level 5 have a probability of 0.72 or greater of achieving that level, whereas some Mathematics pupils have only just over a 50% chance of reaching the same standard.

The targets for level 6 are very different: the targets have been based on pupils' ability to achieve the level. So for each subject, a threshold probability of approximately 0.6 has been set, resulting in a significant variation in the numbers targeted for level 6 and above.

At the time of the research, performance at level 5 was a key statutory indicator of school quality, whereas performance at level 6 was not. The method of setting these targets is noticeably different. In the next section I discuss the school's perspective on the setting of targets.

Conversely, these targets do not influence the options process, because current attainment is used by the school, such that the one hundred most successful pupils at the end of key stage three are selected to enter the traditional GCSE Science course, whether their targets suggest that this is likely to be successful or not.

8.2 From estimates to targets: school interpretation and expectation

I draw here on school documentation and interviews with staff to describe how the school operationalises the procedure for the setting and monitoring of target grades for all pupils. The discussion in this section is based on the interviewees' understanding of the FFT data, and shows how the school uses the data to set individual targets. At the end of the discussion I will draw a conclusion as to the school's definition of the word 'target'. I interviewed the Assistant Head Teacher, the senior member of staff with responsibility for school data. The interview revealed one or two misconceptions about the analysis and production of estimates from the FFT data:

it [the Fischer Family Trust] uses things like post code and where the parents spend their money

Assistant Head Teacher:

This does not quite accord with the information supplied by the Trust, in that the spending habits of parents are not mentioned or recorded in the Trust literature, and the use of post codes is included in the bulk analysis only. But this member of staff is aware that an estimate is made of potential outcomes for all pupils:

Assistant Head Teacher: there's two things with that: we're sort of forbidden to use the word 'target' with the Fischer Family Trust, they're estimates, and what they would say is a child at that starting point in a subject with their particular favoured or not so favoured er... characteristics would typically make that achievement...

So while these "estimates" should not be taken as a direct indication of what the pupil is expected to achieve, they are nevertheless the basis for such targets, as the Assistant Head Teacher continues:

... then what we would do in school is give the teacher that information and then expect them to come up with targets which at least meet that or could exceed it, so what you hope to find is that the kind of kid you're describing ... er... if it's apparent to the teacher from their evidence that they can beat the FFT estimate their target should go up.... the FFT is a kind of road map if you like of what a typical kid would do.

So, while the estimate must be referred to as such, the 'target' is always the same or higher, and no attempt is made to analyse the origin or consequence of these targets.

I used the estimated probabilities to rank the participants against the whole year group of 198 pupils at each key stage – from their known performance at key stage two, to their estimated performance at key stage four. It should be noted that where the estimated ranking improves, this represents an expectation that the particular individual's performance relative to the cohort will increase faster over the two phases, and where the ranking declines, it suggests that the individual's progression is expected to be slower than the others. Note that the system is not predicting that their actual performance will decline (for all schools must now work with an assumption that pupil

performance will steadily improve), but simply that some pupils' performance will improve faster than others'. Table 8.3 shows these rankings for all the participants along with the class as presented in table 5.3:

Table 8.3: Progression of pupil rankings sorted by class (n=198)

1.Name	2. Class (M, I, W, U)	3. Rank at KS2	4.Estimated rank at KS4	5. Change. + numbers indicate a rise up the ranking.
Chris	M	110	139	-28
Emma	M	11	19	-8
Hazel	M	89	109	-20
Jasmina	M	89	73	+16
Mike	M	95	88	+7
Oliver	M	13	50	-37
Paul	M	115	139	-24
Diane	I	79	53	+26
Frank	I	143	129	+14
Gemma	I	50	53	-3
Liam	I	108	109	-1
Richard	I	32	12	+20
Annie	W	66	19	+47
Becky	W	110	80	+30
Ian	W	149	149	-
Kate	W	131	135	-4
Sarah	W	166	174	-8
Natalie	U	181	174	-7

This shows for example that Annie was ranked 66th out of 198 based on the score she achieved in the key stage two National Tests. If she achieves according to the estimates calculated by the FFT, her rank will rise to 19th – an improvement of 47 places. However much her actual performance improves over the coming years, the implication is that this improvement is likely to be faster than many of her cohort. Whereas Oliver on the other hand, ranked 13th when he arrived at the school, has an

estimated grade at key stage four which would place him 37 places lower. If this expectation is fulfilled, many of his colleagues will therefore accelerate past him.

From table 5.6, it can be seen that the estimated rankings are weighted heavily in favour of the working-class participants. The extreme cases include Annie, who is targeted to rise 47 places in the ranking list, and Becky, with a projected rise of 30 places. Oliver on the other hand, with parents in managerial non-manual roles, has a ranking which 'drops' him by 36 places. The pupils for whom rankings are expected to fall significantly (more than 10 places) are either middle class (Oliver and Paul), or have parents and immediate family with a university education (Chris and Hazel).

For eight of the pupils, the change in ranking positions is insignificant (fewer than ten places), and Jasmina is the only middle-class pupil with a ranking which is set to rise significantly, though there is too little data to suggest whether her mixed ethnic background is a factor.

The links here are tentative, and based on a small data set, but it is interesting to speculate that if a working-class pupil arriving at secondary school has a deficit, as suggested by research into the link between class and performance (for example Strand, 2007), then it could be argued that there is a greater capacity for improvement, and if this improvement occurred, it could be to the detriment of other pupils. This raises the question of what measures the school takes to deal with the issue of class. When discussing the effect of background on performance, an understanding of the advantages bestowed on more prosperous pupils was evident from the conversation with the Head of Year Nine:

I: are the more able kids more advantaged some way?

Head of Year: I would suspect there is a stronger interest at home and I think that would apply across all the subjects as well.

I: how can you tell?

Head of Year: comments from the kids, parents evening

I: because those are the parents that turn up?

Head of Year: turn up, interested ... it's a difficult one to provide evidence for but certainly yeah you'd have a feeling that if you had a top set you'd assume that the backgrounds would mostly be quite stable and parents would be quite interested in what they're doing and they'd be pushing their kids to do very well. Whereas at the other end of the spectrum you'd say ... I mean this is generalisation, but the weighting would be towards the other end ... maybe disaffected parents....

I: are these the prosperous parents?

Head of Year: not necessarily, I wouldn't say it's money related, it depends on the parents really – their values and how they value education and how their educational experience has been as well

It is clear that the Head of Year believes that the value placed on education by the family is more important than income – though he places high value on the middle-class notions of 'stability', 'interest' and 'pushing'. These values are more likely (though by no means exclusively) to be present in professional families. And while he is at pains not to link these values to income he nevertheless appears to be asserting that low-income families are more likely to contain 'disaffected parents'. Thus parental aspirations differ according to background and income, and this point is taken up by the Head of Widening Participation, who is a member of the teaching staff with particular focus on careers.

I: returning to the influence of parents – do different social groups make a difference?

Head of WP: All parents are influential, but it's what the choices are that makes the difference; if you've got kids from where I was brought up (Everton) their expectations... their career aspirations are different from if they were brought up [locally].

So the school as a body, and the individual teachers in the school, recognise the influences played by parents in the aspirations and outcomes of the pupils and, as the interviewee says, they will receive guidance on ‘appropriate targets’:

Head of WP: So we’ll get them focusing in on what’s appropriate for them, what they can do, what choices are available and where those choices can take them. Key people are going to do guidance interviews, but eventually I want form tutors to do that. When they’re doing the options they’re taught the citizenship aspects and they’re a little bit more informed themselves.

There is a contradiction here. On the one hand, this member of staff has the aim of guiding pupils along what she sees as an ‘appropriate’ career pathway, but on the other hand she is reinforcing the status quo of middle-class privilege by implying that aspirations should be different from different social areas. When discussing background, staff were generally unwilling to give firm opinions which might be construed as pre-judging a pupil’s home situation, which was a positive and understandable response, but it means that where pupils have a home background which hinders their progress, the action prescribed by the school did not obviously take this into account – all pupils were treated from the white middle-class perspective that progress is the result of targeted and focused intervention relating to performance in assessments.

The use of a rigid approach to target-setting, which was designed and operated to maximise the school’s success in the league tables, demonstrates that performance in the national league tables was the prime motivation here. Evidence for this was that the school chose to set targets based on scheme D in Table 8.1 – the school was under pressure from the Local Authority to set challenging targets, as described by the Assistant Head Teacher:

largely because the LA advisors set the school targets based on it... this is what you have to meet ... you're FFT 'B' makes you the typical school with your kind of catchment, and 'D' the top 25% so you aspire to D

School improvement was a significant issue in the school, and all members of staff appear keenly aware of the need for constant improvement in results:

Head of Year: ... this year there was a big push on getting level 6 and 7 in the SATs which was hugely successful – they were exceeded I think ... certainly met if not exceeded. So at key stage three there was a major improvement in Science ... I don't know about other subjects.

Head of Physics: ...I know for a fact that Science interventions have seemingly...had an effect, the overall Science results have improved.

Pupils were given target grades on entry to the school which were used to set expectations of performance at key stages three and four in every subject. While the targets were shared with the pupils, there was no evidence that the targets were negotiated with them, nor any that the purpose of the targets was explained. While these target grades could be adjusted upwards when pupils exceeded expectations, action was always taken when pupils fell behind their target – in the form of 'intervention'. It appears that the nature of the 'intervention' was to set fairly challenging short-term goals and to monitor the pupil even more carefully. Note that the background of the pupil undergoing intervention was not taken into account; indeed it was vigorously avoided. While staff interviewees acknowledged that socioeconomic background was significant, it was never considered an option to set a target below the estimate calculated by the Fischer Family Trust, nor to provide guided assistance to pupils who were at a disadvantage.

8.3 Pupils' experiences of the institution

In contrast to the field of 'university' – school as a field is a real, lived environment and all the participants have a daily experience of the way the field

operates, and have learned through experience how best to cope with it. All the participants in this study would be regarded by staff as compliant, and only one of them (Frank) describes anything other than compliant behaviour. Even then, he understands clearly that he can choose to behave in a way which will please or displease his teachers, and for most of them he chooses compliant behaviour.

Their demeanour and dress in the interview appeared compliant. They all wore the school uniform tidily, though with some minor digressions (some of the girls wore modest amounts of jewellery in defiance of school rules, and some of the boys wore their top buttons undone). They were comfortable with talking to me from the outset, and this had a lot to do with the fact that I had dressed as a teacher (suit and tie). They therefore tended to address me as 'sir' or 'Mr Cochrane' rather than by first name which I had used to introduce myself.

These are important observations. The way a person dresses is not normally the subject of daily decision-making – it is the subject of custom and practice. The ethos of the school is such that if they dress according to the school code, their life in the school will be easier in that teachers are less likely to confront them. It was not clear through the research whether this conforming behaviour was strategic or not – resistance to rules can be subtle and subversive, though I was unable to detect any motive that suggested subversion. This conforming behaviour comes easily to those individuals who are familiar with the concept of dressing appropriately for different occasions. It is a similar point with conversation – most of the participants appeared comfortable with conversation and while some were slow at first, by the third interview, all participants were willing to contribute fully.

Little of the dialogue concerning school emerges from stage three of the interviews – the vast majority occurs in stages one and two. Where they do discuss

school issues, it is in the context of social and cultural relationships rather than their relationship with the school and their teachers. In stages one and two, they talk about the subjects they like and why they have chosen them. In this area they reflect Hodkinson and Sparkes' (1997) description of rational choice. As we shall see however, this rational choice is based upon a rationale which is distorted or at least constrained by the social constructs they experience (for example the version of reality offered to them by the school) and is typified by views of the world which are somewhat idealised.

The idealistic approach is summed up by Natalie in stage one:

Natalie: I haven't thought much about my options, but I just want a job that I'm happy at...it doesn't matter about the money or anything just as long as you're happy and enjoy what you do.

[stage one focus group]

This approach appears in many of their discussions – they choose subjects because they feel more comfortable with them – either because they achieve better results, or because they have a positive relationship with the teacher. In this extract from stage two, Annie, Oliver and Becky are making rational pragmatic choices – pragmatic because they are choosing situations which will feel comfortable to them, and rational because they perceive that by making this choice their results will be better. This rational behaviour may appear somewhat deterministic, because for people from a working-class background a rational decision may be one which maintains their disadvantage (for example by choosing a lower-status university to stay closer to home) but is at the heart of what Bourdieu recognised as the individual's opportunity for transformative behaviour, whereby those in a position of privilege are better able to make choices which will maintain their privilege.

The rationality demonstrated by the participants is relatively straightforward however, and is based on simple strategic decisions around choosing their favourite subjects with teachers they like:

Annie: [choices:] History over Geog I find it more interesting er get more out of it choosing German over French cos I'm better at it

Oliver: French History PE, the same as before I think. I wanted to take Business and PE, but they're in the same bracket and I'm better at it.

Becky: I chose History over Geography and French over German.

I: Right. How did you know you wanted to do that?

Becky: I find History more interesting than Geography and I think I'm better at French than German.

[stage two focus group]

Chris echoes Becky's thoughts exactly:

Chris: Yeah I've thought about it and I'm gonna choose Geography over History because I find History a bit boring and Geography over French because I'm better at it

Chris: yeah, I've chosen Woodwork out of DT

I: you said chosen...

Chris: You've got to get the levels and work at it

[stage two focus group]

Chris's comment here suggests an awareness of the need to have the sufficient capital to get onto the course he wants. There is a tacit acceptance of the school's position here, and no thought apparent in Chris's mind that there is a goal he can achieve here through his own determination.

The rationalism displayed by the participants demonstrates where their concerns lie – Emma for example recognises that Science will be an important subject for her, but has had a bad experience. She now worries that her studies will be affected by the quality of her learning experience in the future. She is enjoying Science at the moment, but what about next year?

Emma: I'm worried about picking my options cos last year I really hated Science cos we had loads of subs [supply teachers] because someone left, but this year we've got a really good teacher, but when I pick my options I might pick Textiles and I might get a bad teacher and I and I might not do as well

[stage one focus group]

A further example of rationality is the choice of a subject which they perceive as matching a particular career trajectory. Colley and Comber (2003), reviewing research projects carried out by themselves and others over the last three decades, report a continued gender bias in subject choices – and we see here that Hazel is choosing a subject almost exclusively chosen by girls.

Frank: you know you said you've got to like a subject and it's not about what career you want....you want the career you choose, you'd want to like that job so the subjects you take to get that job you probably like anyway

I: Hazel, do you still want to work with children?

Hazel: I'm taking child development, so yeah ... I've got little brothers and sisters so I think I'd be good working with them ... my auntie is a nursery nurse – that makes me feel I could do something like that

Jasmina: I'm going to go with what I think, because some people say that... oh, I don't want to be in this class because I'll be alone because none of my friends are going to it, but if you think it's going to help you in life, then go for it, you don't need friends to help you learn

[stage two focus group]

The participants are becoming aware that qualifications carry 'symbolic value'. That is to say that while they may carry equivalent intrinsic value (which might relate to points on a UCAS tariff), certain qualifications are valued differently when they are presented to prospective employers and admissions tutors.

Liam: if you do well in the SATs you might be able to get the grades at GCSE if you're in a high set

[stage one focus group]

Richard: French, Business and Media, don't think it's the same as I said last time... I just thought I'd get more out of it than if I did PE - I thought you'd get more career opportunities with Business and Media

[stage two focus group]

Richard feels that PE will not carry the same value as an equivalent qualification in Business or Media. This shows that he knows that different subjects may carry different intrinsic value, but he is not yet aware that in fact the symbolic value of a Media Studies GCSE is likely to be as low as PE. This 'value' is analogous to an economic value – a place on a particular course can be exchanged for the qualification, providing that the value of the qualification matches the expectations of the institution which is offering the place. Typically, such institutions will expect a given number of UCAS points according to an objective tariff, but will prohibit some subjects according to a subjective tariff by refusing to recognise achievements in some of the more-recently introduced subjects such as Media Studies.

Final elements of discussion revolve around the participants' attitudes to their teachers – as with Emma, they recognise the profound effect that a poor relationship with a teacher can have. Frank was particularly concerned about one of the teachers, and a number of the group had actively avoided this teacher through their choices, though commented that it was difficult because the 'choice' was compulsory for some of them:

Frank: [names teacher] – ... really is the worst teacher in the school. All [s/he] does is write stuff down and make you copy it off the board and then when you write it down you know you don't even pay attention you just look at the word and write it down, you don't even realise...

Frank: I picked [names subject] also because like in [alternative subject] I've got a worse teacher – I've got [same teacher] and all [s/he] makes us do is copy off the board and I don't

think I've learned anything properly since like year 8 in _____, and I really just can't handle it so sometimes I can handle _____ a bit better.

[stage two focus group]

It is interesting to note that all the pupils have accepted that compliant behaviour will be beneficial to them – whilst in the field of the school, the participants adopt a position which conforms to the practices of the school, and these particular individuals do not seem to have a problem with that. They are compliant to the school rules, and when they transgress, they recognise that it is through their choice and not the fault of the teacher concerned. Most significant however, is the fact that alone amongst these participants, Frank recognises the need to opt *into* compliant behaviour, while for the others compliant behaviour is embedded in their habitus – for them bad behaviour would be a process of opting *out*. Here Frank is showing that he has to make an effort to be well behaved:

I: How do you behave in RE?

Frank: A bit naughty. If I don't like the subject... I'm a bit naughty so I don't switch off... I'm not that bad, I like talk and stuff like that...I get my name on the board. I know I shouldn't but it's too hard not to...It's not just me, the whole class is naughty isn't it?

[Emma: yes it's a bad class] ... there's a load of people who don't care and think it's good to be in set 5.

[stage two focus group]

But note the attitude of both Frank and Emma – Frank clearly accepts that he is the one that is out of line, and Emma backs him up by saying the class is bad. They do not question the position of the school.

The group's issues with the unnamed teacher mentioned earlier show a critical attitude towards the teaching methods employed, but do not question the teacher's authority to be in that position. The 'dispositions to act' for these participants emerge

from the habitus they have developed over a lifetime, and include the embodiment of their behaviour in school (Reay et al., 2005). In other sections of the analysis, it is possible to identify clear differences in the habitus displayed by the participants – in other words, they talk and act differently from one another. However these differences are diminished here in the sense that their responses are much more closely aligned – they each display compliant modes of speech, behaviour and dress – as Chris says, he believes they all behave well:

I: So how do you behave in DT?

Chris: Fine I'm not the class clown.

I: is that because you like the subject?

Chris: It's one of my favourite subjects.

I: do you mess around any?

Chris: no

I: you're all dead good are you?

Chris: yeah.

[stage two focus group]

If, as the research discussed in chapter three shows, it is true that pupils with underprivileged backgrounds perform worse at school, then we might expect that the future performance (and hence the predicted rankings) for Annie, Becky, Diane and Richard should go down. Two of them are from single-parent families. If factors such as these, which many studies have shown to hinder progress in education, were to be taken into consideration then it should be recognised that their progress is likely to continue to be hindered, and that they will slide backwards in the rankings rather than move forwards. It seems that the analysis of the performance data used by the school recognises a larger deficit in these pupils and regards this as greater room for improvement, responding by setting more stringent targets.

If these individuals are to turn this perceived ability into an investment of cultural capital, they are likely to undertake a transformation of habitus, otherwise any capital they do accumulate will remain unused and their socioeconomic status will not change. Deterministic interpretations of Bourdieu's work hold that the transformation of habitus is impossible (or that it occurs at random). However it is a strength of the theory since habitus allows for the description of the mechanism by which transformation can take place. As Reay (2004: 432) points out, "Bourdieu continued throughout his career to challenge the view of habitus as a form of determinism, asserting that habitus offers the only durable form of freedom - that given by the mastery of an art." No such efforts at transformations are apparent with Annie, Diane and Richard, but that is not to say they will not develop stronger ambition later in life.

Chris, Hazel, Oliver and Paul have been placed in rankings which are predicted to head significantly in the other direction. All are from professional families with evidence of investment of forms of capital which are typical of the middle-classes (degrees and professional training for example). On this analysis, these pupils might be expected to perform well in school and at the very least, maintain their positions in the rankings listed in Table 8.3, especially since the cultural capital invested by their families is likely to be beneficial to their progress.

8.4 Summary

The school has adopted a targeting system which relies on the use of national data to ascribe a probability score for each pupil in each assessment they will take during their school career. Instead of using the probability score to assign an appropriate target for each pupil as might be expected, the system is used to rank the pupils in order and then to select from this ranking list whatever number of pupils is required to achieve a particular assessment result. So for example, if the school has

been set a target of 78% in a particular assessment, the top 78% of pupils according to the ranking list will be given that as their target. Interventions are used to push pupils towards these targets, while no interventions are given to pupils who reach or exceed the targets.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter nine

9.1 Introduction

Research Questions one and two were concerned with the pupils' social behaviours and the relationship of these behaviours to their social background, and I summarise the conclusions from those areas first. I then discuss the third Research Question, which is concerned with the effect of school-based decisions on the pupils, before concluding with an evaluation and reflection on the thesis.

9.2 The decision-making process as a social act (RQ1 &2)

The findings point to a number of examples where the participants' dispositions match the pattern of their inherited capital – where the cultural capital of the family included university qualifications, there was often more confidence in recognising university as an option. If the presence of this form of capital was lacking, then self-confidence was also lacking, and this manifested itself in a reluctance to move too far away. It is clear that nearly all the participants recognised university education as a desirable goal, and most were encouraged in their thinking by their families. It is not the desire for further and Higher Education which is necessarily lacking; it is the confidence to pursue it.

This lack of confidence also manifested itself in the variation of ambition from one interview to the next. The participants with the least support from their background made the most varied choices. Natalie for example, considering veterinary work and hairdressing, while at the other end of the spectrum Emma and Jasmina seemed the most content not to make up their minds yet.

The above argument should not be taken to imply that the participants are without agency – merely that habitus shaped the directions in which they were able or willing to look, and the distance they were able to see.

Much research discusses the reasons by which working-class young people reject university as an option, and these are often to do with pragmatic considerations of the sacrifices that would be required (Archer et al. 2007), or concerns about feelings as an outsider (Reay et al. 2009). However there is not always a clear dichotomy between choosing to go to university and choosing not to go to university, and in this project I observed a range of responses which had some link to social background.

There was a tendency for the participants with cultural capital which involved attendance at university by parents and siblings to make choices aligned with the notion (Reay et al 2005:21) that ‘...an individual’s ability to deploy knowledge, skills and competences successfully is powerfully classed... we illustrate the salience of confidence, certainty and sense of entitlement that is generated through high levels of cultural capital ...’ This confidence enabled such pupils to talk about travelling to universities a significant distance from home, whereas the decisions facing the participants without this background of cultural capital were about choosing universities close to home.

The sense of entitlement goes only so far, however. All the participants regarded Oxford and Cambridge Universities as domains for ‘posh’ people, and did not feel they would be comfortable there, even though one of them had a sister at Oxford. The sentiments are rarely about feeling unworthy or inadequate – the participants do not doubt their ability to qualify for university – they are more about wanting to stay in familiar territory.

In chapter four I described how the methodology was developed to achieve an understanding of how the pupils themselves felt about their career and educational aspirations and choices. Only then could I begin to understand the part played by their cultural background for Research Question Two. The concept of career has changed in the United Kingdom over the last 60 years, particularly in that the duration and type of career has altered drastically. Young people are no longer guided towards a particular industry or direction, but given more general advice about continuing education. It was plain in the responses of the participants that there was a great deal of understandable uncertainty in their thinking, and this manifested itself in apparent changes of mind over the three stages of focus group interviews. This is not surprising in view of the uncertainty of the employment market – a market which changes rapidly enough to upset the most carefully laid plans. Only three had carried out any career-related preparation – Kate, who was taking advice from a family friend over her hopes of becoming a flight attendant; Sarah, who had obtained an agent through the help of her sister; and Becky, who, inspired by the sacrifices of her mother, was working with a charitable medical organisation to boost her chances of entering the medical profession.

It is significant that in all three cases, the family was at the root of their motivation, and sources other than the school were providing guidance and support. As for the meaning and values assigned to different career paths, there were two distinct strands: job satisfaction and financial reward. All agreed that job satisfaction (whatever that may mean) was more important than the income gained, though none argued for the acceptance of a low wage at any cost. But ‘job satisfaction’ is a social construct, and will mean different things to different people, and in their pursuit of job satisfaction the participants were strongly directed by their habitus. Evidence for this came in the way they expressed their opinions over issues of equality. They all espoused strongly-held

opinions over the rights of women to enter all professions, or over the entitlement of people from different ethnic backgrounds to equal opportunities. However, when conversations developed, their more deeply-held opinions were revealed such that some of the boys gave quite starkly-polarised negative views on the ability of women in roles which they saw as male-dominated (such as an airline pilot), and equally negative views of men in other roles (such as hairdressing). But by the same token, the girls tended to qualify their own belief in the equal ability of women by seeing themselves in somewhat gendered roles.

The jobs and professions of their parents were predominantly aligned along gendered roles – the fathers tended to be in manual or managerial roles (or in both: the management *of* manual roles), and the mothers tended to be in nurturing roles (or in the management of nurturing roles). The participants had not sought to break out of these family traditions, though there was some suggestion that the middle-class participants were more likely to do this than their working-class counterparts.

The interactions in the focus group interviews presented further evidence that illuminates the process of cultural reproduction. At one stage of the interviews, some of the girls showed disapproval of a fellow pupil who was trying (but failing) to join their social group. They denied her full membership of the group because of cultural differences (particularly the way she dressed) of which they did not approve. They have learned scenarios like this from birth – they are played out right across society – and the ‘rules’ of symbolic capital discussed in chapter three are learned from a very early age. It is the adoption of these rules and practices which makes cultural reproduction so robust.

In addition, in section 2.4 I discussed the significance of gender as a social construct in the process of cultural and social reproduction. In the above examples it is

possible to identify an alignment with forms of femininity and masculinity which tend to reinforce the role of the female as one of reproduction and not of productivity, and that of the male as breadwinner. As discussed in the same section, Bourdieu (2006) took the view that Higher Education is becoming more accessible for women, particularly those in the middle-classes, and the above alignments tend to support this view. The girls identified in Table 5.5 as middle-class were more inclined towards Higher Education and less inclined towards a more obviously gendered occupation.

In line with much current research (eg Bricheno & Thornton 2007), there was evidence that people from the wider family network were used as role models in preference to teachers. This has implications in the Widening Participation context, since the role models available to the children generally had the same social and cultural background, and this may serve as one of the mechanisms which tend to perpetuate the shortfall in Higher Education participation for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The participants were acutely aware of the function of role models in helping them move forward; but they may have lacked access to the sort of role modelling that would be of most use to them. It is likely that role models from the family network have been influencing these young people from an early age, which supports the idea now gaining ground that careers advice needs to start much earlier than has been the case recently.

Bourdieu's theory provides an explanatory framework for the persistent gap in attainment between different social classes. It was possible to identify where the participants were accumulating (or not accumulating) social and cultural capital, and how they were using this to make progress through the education system. They clearly understood that there was a system of rules and practices they had to negotiate, and while they were willing to negotiate these, there was a limit. Virtually all of them regarded universities like Oxford and Cambridge as 'too snobby' (Diane) and 'much

easier for posh people to get into' (Hazel). They all knew that something more than high grades would be necessary for entry to the more prestigious universities. Additionally, some were prepared to go to considerable lengths to develop their qualifications and experience to improve their chances. It was as if they were aware that their level of cultural capital was insufficient as it stood, and that they needed to invest some more. They did this by identifying role models who could provide them with advice and guidance, and to a certain extent adopting their practices. Becky is one such example, and is of sufficient significance to deal with separately. These young people were able to articulate their social dispositions with some clarity. The example mentioned above in which a group of girls was critical of one of their peers was an example of 'legitimation' (or in this case the denial of legitimation).

When using any theory, even one as established as this, it is often possible to view it with a degree of scepticism, or from a new angle. It was developed by Bourdieu to describe a malign purpose – the perpetuation of privilege by the middle-classes and the exclusion of members of working-class families. Instead, an understanding of habitus might provide us with a mechanism for helping youngsters to progress in their education.

9.3 Transformations in cultural capital: Becky's story

In this section I discuss the evidence that one of the participants made attempts to raise her levels of cultural capital in her desire to become a medical student. This is important in highlighting the use of Bourdieu's work to demonstrate the possibility of positive outcomes from this analysis.

Becky comes from a socioeconomic background which identifies her in the cohort that researchers such as Broecke and Hamed (2008) and Strand (2007) have identified as disadvantaged, in that they report a consistent negative impact of

socioeconomic status on future attendance in Higher Education, even when the effects of prior attainment are taken out. This ‘prior attainment’ in these pieces of research are results in GCSE exams, and at the time of the research, Becky had not even taken them yet. What the above researchers do not address is the implication that ‘prior attainment’ of young people from the lower socioeconomic backgrounds has already been affected by this background. Anyone of Becky’s ability on entry to this school (as measured by the Cognitive Ability Test), after taking account of her date of birth (early or late in the school year), her gender, and her performance in core subjects received from the calculations a GCSE target that ranked her in 80th place in this school (see Table 5.3). Yet when she arrived at the school in year seven, she was ranked in 110th place according to her key stage two results – and so this is a measure of the disadvantage she has already suffered in her early years. But this disadvantage was not taken into account in setting her target.

But through her ambition, Becky provides a striking example of the process through which the participants must pass if they are to significantly transform their habitus. The school does not provide a mechanism for this, and Becky must take the initiative. She has proactively re-shaped her future by seeking experiences that aim to provide her with forms of cultural capital that are not available from the school. She has understood that grades alone will not be enough for entry into medical school. Yet school policy was geared towards a focus on progress towards grades that had been calculated on entry to the school, and these target grades were insufficient for her to qualify her for medical school. Becky, upon deciding to aim for entry to a medical degree, immediately recognised that her targets needed to be revised. She knew that for such a course, she would need GCSEs with a high proportion of grade As, and if she achieves these grades her performance will put her in the top 20 or so in the school.

Yet the target setting exercise placed her at a predicted rank of 80th, and all the interventions are designed to help her achieve that. If she meets her intermediate targets on the way, there will be no intervention. In a study of working-class people at elite institutions, Reay et al (2009, 1110) refer to the “...refashioning they had ... to engage in to become academically successful students”, and this is precisely what Becky is attempting to do to as she takes actions which will transform her habitus as she encounters the alien environment of the medical professional world.

9.4 School target-setting (RQ 3)

I now turn to a discussion, relating to Research Question Three, of the systems used by the school to set targets for pupils, to monitor progress, and to perform interventions when targets were not met.

The use of background data by the Fischer Family Trust was carried out on the whole data set at the time the pupils joined the school in year seven. Geodemographic information (the distribution of home post codes of the school population, the percentage of pupils on free school meals) was used to identify a cohort of schools with similar demographics with which to compare the school, and an individual pupil's projected progress was mapped out by considering similar pupils at comparable institutions. The only information used to alter an individual's potential score related to their gender, date of birth and relative performance in core subjects, which seems anomalous since as Strand (2007) and Broecke and Hamed (2008) point out, the biggest single influence on pupil attainment is class. In addition, it was noticeable that staff tended treat any suggestion that their views about pupils were prejudiced by opinions about background as a taboo subject.

Table 8.2 demonstrates that where externally-imposed targets were being addressed, the individual targets for pupils were based on their ranking and not on any

probability that the individual might achieve the ‘required’ grade. Thus we have the anomalous situation that a pupil can be set different targets in two subjects even when the probability of their achieving a particular grade is equal.

The school’s priority has focussed on its holistic performance rather than the ability of the individual pupil to achieve a particular grade.

The staff described interventions which the school used to help pupils who were falling behind their targets, and there was (unrelated) evidence that the school’s results were improving. Staff believed that the increases in numbers of pupils achieving the higher levels in Science were attributable to the interventions with individual students, but no attempt had been made to identify whether it was the performance of these students which had resulted in the increase. There is evidence of this disconnection between cause and effect in recent literature: Pugh, Mangan and Gray (2011) link increased funding in areas such as staffing and ICT resources to improvements in grades. There is no indication that any evaluation has taken place of the actual interventions used – it appears to be deemed unnecessary because of the ‘success’ of the project. But if Becky achieves the grades for which she is targeted at the expense of her ambition of a place at medical school, does that constitute success?

This is a telling and important conclusion. Even allowing for the small size of the sample, the evidence suggests that the calculations by the school of target grades do not take account of the pupils’ backgrounds, even though background is repeatedly cited as the single most significant cause of under-achievement.

The demographic information used to generate the pupils’ targets was not used in considering the targets of individual pupils, and it can occur that the participants who might have the most challenging backgrounds through their lack of cultural capital are given the most challenging targets. Conversely, the participants from middle-class

backgrounds frequently appear to have less challenging targets. This is a small sample, and I am not attempting to make a generalisation here. However, the inescapable conclusion is that the targets are not consistent with individual need but at the same time they may have important power in shaping the institutional expectations for pupil's performance.

Of huge significance here is that the targets were not negotiable. The school did not re-assess a pupil with a challenging target set by this process – when such a pupil fell behind their target, an 'intervention' was put in place. The intervention did not appear to assess the individual need for the pupil, but to provide a monitoring system to ensure the pupil worked harder.

An alternative explanation would be that the school made an assumption that the working-class children had a greater potential for progress because they started their secondary school career with an attainment deficit; and that conversely the potential for improvement anticipated for the middle-class children is lower because much of their potential has already been realised through the investment of cultural and social capital in them by their families. However, there is no evidence that the school attempted to make a link between the attainment data and the target data, either by the school or by the Fischer Family Trust. Therefore it must be concluded that the effect described above is an accident of the statistical model, and that a vital opportunity to link target-setting with social background has been missed. By this accident, the process of cultural reproduction has actually been reinforced – working-class children appear to be put at a position of disadvantage by the application of targets in this way.

9.5 Evaluation and Reflection

That the education system has so persistently failed to achieve equal participation for all in Higher Education demonstrates a need for a matching persistence

in researchers to continue investigating the causes of inequality until progress is made towards greater equity in educational attainment.

I have charted the changes in the educational system over the 60-year period because the inequalities built into the system by the 1944 Act have been replaced by a different set of inequalities in the reforms made since the 1988 Education Act. In this conclusion I have discussed how the evidence sheds new light on why the regime of performativity has not succeeded in addressing educational inequality. Schools are under clear pressure to set targets which seek to place them in a higher position in league tables, so that in the quasi-market that now exists, they might become irresistible to potential customers. However, if targets are to be set for pupil performance, they must be based on two things: firstly, they must be based on the ability of an individual to achieve that target; and secondly, in negotiation with the individual, on their needs and aspirations. Part of this process will involve recognising the cultural and social reasons why aspirations might be below the potential of an individual, and this is where an analysis of habitus or capital can help, in identifying strategies which will invest levels of capital which are appropriate to the individual.

The use of focus group interviews as my primary data source enabled a degree of participation for the pupils so that the research was being carried out *with* them as opposed to *on* them. I believe my success here was somewhat limited by the fact that I had already designed the Research Questions by the time I had approached the participants, and in future would leave some of the design until after some negotiation and discussion with the participants. There are some aspects of this which cannot be discussed because of the confidentiality of some of the data. However, it became clear that as the project progressed, the participants became more interested in the outcomes

and more involved in its development. It is not just because they were more mature that their involvement in the stage three focus groups yielded richer data.

The approach used yielded much useful evidence which enabled me to evaluate levels of cultural and social capital, and to observe the participants as they made use of their capital in discussions, or demonstrated how their levels of capital limited (or extended) their reach. However, it was more difficult to analyse evidence concerning habitus. In chapter four, I listed a number of indicators of habitus drawn from Reay (1995b): beliefs; values; conduct; speech; dress; manners. Evidence concerning some of these indicators (principally beliefs and values) was easily forthcoming, and there were interesting discussions about attitudes to gender and class as well as other issues not formally a part of the thesis, such as ethnicity and disability, which revealed some of the individual dispositions. However, indicators such as conduct, dress and manners were more problematic, since I met the pupils in school whilst they were wearing their uniform and whilst their conduct conformed to expectations held by the school about behaviour in front of visitors. Whilst they were demonstrating the disposition to conform, and acknowledging that this is an important component of their habitus, it would have been interesting to conduct the interviews in a neutral venue with no constraints over the way they dressed.

I argued strongly in favour of a principally qualitative approach from the outset because of the nature of the study, and believe this to be appropriate. It is interesting however, that one of the most significant conclusions to emerge from the data is based on the statistical analysis carried out by the Fischer Family Trust, and this was an unforeseen circumstance when the project was planned. Therefore my key suggestion for further research relates to the use of statistical analysis in the formation of pupil targets – there is clearly much to be investigated about setting targets and measuring

school performance through targets of *pupil* performance. It is not necessarily the case that an underperforming child is doing so through the neglect or inferior practice of the school (nor through any fault of its own), yet this is the inevitable conclusion reached by the quasi-market approach, and this then draws attention away from the remedy, which must lie with the provision of the kind of support which the family is unable to give.

This thesis has broken new ground in investigating how schools use organisations such as the Fischer Family Trust in setting targets for individuals and for schools as a whole. Little research has been carried out in this field of education, which is unfortunate since it has such far-reaching consequences. However, it is important to note that this is one piece of small-scale research based at one location, and must be repeated on a larger scale and in more locations if wide-ranging conclusions are to be drawn.

Reports derived from large-scale quantitative surveys provide useful information for informing policy at a national or regional level, and many researchers argue strongly for this approach (eg Goldthorpe 2009, Strand 2007). However, such studies provide little information about the lived experience of individual people, and this study sheds fresh light on the processes which account for the trends reported in the large-scale research. The information provided by the Fischer Family Trust can be used to predict generic outcomes for the school as a whole, but is not appropriate for the prediction of outcomes for individual pupils, nor can it be used to come to any understanding about the individual circumstances of each pupil. Advantage is accumulated by the privileged sectors of society through numerous increments accumulated over a significant period of time. This positive progress at the expense of other sections of society was described by Bourdieu as symbolic violence (Weininger 2005). While the

effects of symbolic violence are visible in the numerical analysis (for example the gap in attainment between working-class and middle-class people), the individual acts of symbolic violence are not.

In addition, many large qualitative studies have highlighted symbolic violence (whether referred to as such or not) as a dichotomy in which young working class people show a tendency to shun Higher Education (Archer et al. 2007), or in which they encounter Higher Education as an alien environment (Reay et al. 2009). These studies are able to identify commonalities of dispositions and to identify the link between these dispositions and social background.

However there is an additional layer to individual experience in that there is a spectrum of responses between working-class youngsters and society, and a multiplicity of small acts of symbolic violence, and in choosing a self-selecting sample of participants across a range of backgrounds, I have been able to observe some of the small positive and negative increments of symbolic deeds at play in the participants' lives. Using a Bourdeuian analysis has made these individual symbolic acts visible, and that is a significant advantage of this approach. This work has therefore focused on these individual incremental symbolic acts.

There are some limitations to this approach:

- First, the link described between individuals' actions and their social background is relatively weak. There is limited information from the study which can be used to confidently identify the social classification of each individual without going into more detail about parental income and home circumstances, while I chose to focus more on the participants' own positioning.

- As a result of this, I cannot claim to have demonstrated the link between social background and social disadvantage. A sample of eighteen participants does not allow such a conclusion to be drawn. However, the literature indicates strongly that such a link exists, and it is therefore valid to use the data to identify the individual deeds which contribute to the phenomenon.

In spite of these acknowledged limitations, I believe there is much to be learned from an understanding of the significant effect which might be brought about through small acts of symbolic violence, some of which can be exacted by pupils on other pupils, and some of which can be exacted institutionally. What is clear is that many of these acts are unintentional and unlooked for, and yet they can accumulate to sometimes devastating effect. Duckworth & Cochrane (2012) describe how a group of adult learners had become alienated from education through negative experiences in school which took many years to both acknowledge and overcome. This thesis has provided a perspective which seeks to help educationalists identify and prevent these negative experiences at an early stage.

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Annex 1

Progression letter

17 July 2006

Mr Matthew Cochrane
109, Blaguegate Lane
Lathom
Skelmersdale
Lancashire
WN8 8TY

Dear Matt,

We are pleased to tell you that your thesis proposal was passed by the Ed.D. Examination Board last week.

You can now move to the thesis-writing stage of the programme. Your supervisor will be Nafsika Alexiadou. Your second supervisor (who will attend annual progress review meetings and read a final draft of your work) is Steve Whitehead. We hope you will make contact with your supervisor over the summer, in order that you are prepared to start work on the thesis early in the new semester.

We attach markers' comments on your proposal. In due course, we will also forward to you any comments made by the External Examiner.

With best wishes

Farzana
Ken

Annex 2
Interview transcription sample: Stage 1 Interview 1
Annie Becky Chris stage one interview 1

1
2
3
4 *Have you begun thinking about the subjects you'll be taking.... Becky?*
5 Becky: yes
6 *you have? What have you decided so far?*
7 Becky: I chose history over geography and French over German.
8 *Right. How did you know you wanted to do that?*
9 Becky: I find history more interesting than geog and I think I'm better at French than
10 German.
11 *are those the only two you've decided so far?*
12 Becky: yeah
13 *thanks I'll come back to you later*
14 Annie: History over geog I find it more interesting er get more out of it
15 Choosing German over French cos I'm better at it
16 *(interrupting to E) you said choosing French over German are you two friends, pals*
17 Becky & Annie: yeah
18 *have you discussed this together?*
19 Becky: sort of
20 *are you likely to do things together because you're pals or will you do your own subjects*
21 *come what may?*
22 Becky: do our own subjects
23 *Yeah right Chris how about you?*
24 Chris: Yeah I've thought about it and I'm gonna choose geog over history because I find
25 that hist a bit boring and ger over French because I'm better at it
26 *you've all mentioned the same subjects. Are there any others?*
27 Chris: yeah, I've chosen woodwork out of DT
28 *you said chosen,*
29 Chris: You've got to get the levels and work at it
30 *to do what?*
31 Chris: to get the subject you want in DT
32 *is that right? So how do you behave in DT*
33 Chris: Fine I'm not the class clown.
34 *is that because you like the subject?*
35 Chris: It's one of my favourite subjects.
36 *so you've all decided. Have all your friends decided as well? (Annie: er) Do you talk about*
37 *this together?*
38 Becky: Annie: Talk about it with our friends
39 *Is there any info you've had from the school yet?*
40 Becky: no
41 *how do you know this is happening?*
42 Becky: er knowledge I've heard it off other people like cousins and that
43 *anybody tell you at the beginning of the year? You know, 'this is the most important year of*
44 *your life'?*
45 *(all laugh)*
46 Chris: Exactly what you've said
47 *So you've been told this year you've got your SAT results*
48 *I'll come to ask whether you've thought about what the options are*

49 *So who else do you talk to about this?*
50 Chris: I talk to my parents, I've told them over & over again but they're ... just... not
51 bothered
52 *is that because they're not interested*
53 Chris: it's probably because they know I'll do well in it
54 *so they're leaving it up to you*
55 Chris: if they wanted me to do a subject that I didn't want to do, it would be like pressure & I
56 wouldn't do well at it. But if I do a subject I want to do then ill be better at it
57 *Thanks. What about you Annie?*
58 Annie: Yeah I've spoken to my sister about it because she's in college now
59 Becky: I've talked about it with my family as well but they don't really take it that seriously
60 yet I think they waiting until its closer.... Maybe it is closer now, but.....
61 *When do you actually make the decision, I mean when is the school going to give you the*
62 *information about choosing your options?*
63 Annie: May or something I think
64 *Have you spoken to your friends about this*
65 Chris: no I haven't
66 *Do you feel you should get more advice*
67 Chris: Sometimes, but sometimes they go too quick for us. They go.... I mean like lessons,
68 say, do one lesson on something in maths and they go straight onto another lesson but.. and
69 then you go back to the other subject.. back to the other,, like,, algebra you go back to that..
70 but
71 Becky: yeah
72 *what do you think is the..where is the most important source of information for you to decide*
73 *what options you're going to take.*
74 Annie: I think it's ourselves..partly
75 *it's what you already know about yourselves*
76 Annie: what teachers... how they (indistinct) what we like best
77 *so Becky, what's your strongest subject?*
78 Becky: erm it's either French or English maths & geog are my weakest
79 *yeah... where do you feel you fit in your maths class?*
80 Becky: erm well im in set 3 so its kind of low, I don't think im really stupid, but (laughs) I'm
81 not that good
82 *how do the teachers react to you cos you're better at English you said didn't you so how do*
83 *your teachers react to you. Do you think they react any differently to you because you're*
84 *good at English*
85 Becky: well my English teacher acts as if I know what im doing she leaves me to it whereas
86 in maths I always ask for help so my teacher has to..like.. come to me and explain
87 Annie: my favourite subjects are re and hist but I'm not very good at maths
88 Chris: my favourite subjects are german, maths, geography and pe. And my worst subjects
89 are re and history
90 *so.. what does the re teacher treat you like?*
91 Chris: erm she treats us all the same cos we've not got put in sets, but say like in English I'm
92 in set 2, you get treated like more mature than say set three would
93 *(to Becky) do you notice this cos you're in set 2 and set 3*
94 Becky: erm I was in set 2 for English but I got moved up and in set 1 it's harder but I can do
95 it whereas in set 2 it's easier
96 *cos you said before didn't you that your English teacher knows you can get on with work and*
97 Becky: like at the beginning of the lesson she'll explain it and go through it, and then she'll
98 know we fine, and if we need a question we just put our hands up and that...

99 *and she'll leave you to it... do you feel any of this Annie*
100 Annie: No cos I don't like English, y'know
101 we don't really get treated like we know what we're doing
102 *is this going to have an influence on the way you'll choose your subjects then?*
103 Annie: erm.. probably
104 *no.. you're not in the same set?*
105 Annie: no
106 *cos you..does that make you like English less? Cos (to Becky) you like English don't you? ..is*
107 *this because the teacher treats you like an adult?*
108 Becky: plus I like writing stories and
109 *so there's part of it you like anyway, but you also like the way the lesson goes, whereas Annie*
110 *I think you're saying you feel not quite as happy as Becky does in English*
111 Annie: yeah well I like English, but
112 *M.. you're not quite as happy as she (Becky) is in your lessons*
113 *are there other subjects that... 'I'm not going to choose that subject because of the way the*
114 *lesson goes'.. would that be fair?*
115 Chris: yeah erm say.. in maths, I'm good at it but I'm in set 3 sometimes I feel I should be
116 moving up to set 2 because I got a level 6 in set 3, which is quite good...it just annoys me
117 sometimes half the time I know what I'm doing and half the time we've already gone over it
118 and I know I can do it really quick but he doesn't put me up a set and...
119 *M..that makes you work less hard does it?*
120 Chris: yeah. Cos you feel you know all the work and sometimes you do and sometimes it's
121 just really easy..but..
122 *do you mess around any?*
123 Chris: no
124 *you're all dead good are you?*
125 Chris: yeah. Half the time we're on the computers as well so there's hardly any work
126 involved.
127 Becky: I feel as if I want to do more... it may sound stupid, but I want to do as much work as
128 possible
129 *sounds perfectly normal to me! But it's difficult to ask 'can I have more work'*
130 Becky: yes cos they'll think you're...
131 pause
132 *have you thought about what sort of job you want to do?*
133 Becky: yeah but it doesn't have anything to do with studies.. I want to do something on the
134 side but I've not thought about a job I could do
135 *you mean you want to do a part time job*
136 Becky: well I thought I might want to be a model, but it's got nothing to do with
137 *what so if you didn't become a model...do you think a model is something you're determined*
138 *to be, or is it something quite like to do?*
139 Becky: determined, but if I didn't, I need to have something to fall back on
140 *have you thought about what that would be?*
141 Becky: well, I've thought that I want to be a journalist.. people told me I should be
142 *OK, I'll come back to that. How about you Annie?*
143 Annie: er I want to be a teacher or a psychologist
144 *so you've thought about that quite a lot obviously...what would being a psychologist mean,...*
145 *what would you do as a psychologist*
146 Annie: I'm not.. my sister does psychology
147 *I see.. she's the one that's gone to college?*
148 Annie: yes

149 *ok. How about you Chris?*

150 Chris: I want to be a policeman when I grow up, but if I don't like... make the grades in say

151 PE or like a different grade altogether then I'd quite like to be something like a builder or a

152 technician or plumber cos I'd like to learn how to do that, say if I had my own family I'd like

153 to support them and make like as much money as possible.

154 *why the police?*

155 Chris: I like the police because I like the way that erm they have to keep things under control

156 and erm I'm quite good at sorting out arguments, so...,

157 *have you thought about going to university?*

158 Becky: yes

159 *you said yes Becky?*

160 Becky: yeah – definitely going

161 *Annie?*

162 Annie: yeah

163 *ok Chris?*

164 Chris: hopefully, yeah

165 *but you said you might be a builder*

166 Chris: I know yeah but..

167 *it's not that I'm saying there's anything wrong with being a builder, but you don't need to go*

168 *to university*

169 Chris: I know but it's like, a job you can fall back on if you know what I mean.

170 Cos if you want to go to university to study to be like a policeman can't you?

171 *yes, but you can also be a policeman without going to university*

172 Chris: yeah, but I want to be, like as qualified as I can.

173 *OK Annie, you want to be a psychologist or a teacher*

174 Annie: yes

175 *do you know what subjects you need to do in order to be a teacher?*

176 Annie: no

177 *is that because you don't really feel you need to know that just yet?*

178 Annie: yeah, plus I don't really know how to find out

179 *so you've not really given a huge amount of thought to which subjects you're going to choose*

180 *because you don't know which subjects will help you become a psychologist or teacher?*

181 Annie: no

182 *how about you Becky, you said you wanted to go to university, but what subject?*

183 Becky: I think I need to do English..

184 *because you said you wanted to be a journalist. Have you talked to people about what you*

185 *need to study now?*

186 Becky: no but I've like talked to my step mum about going to university and being a

187 journalist

188 *and does your step mum encourage this?*

189 Becky: My mum's determined that I'm going to university and every time I mention it she

190 says yes you are going. She really wants me to go!

191 *does that put pressure on you*

192 Becky: No cos I want to go cos I want to do the best I can

193 *did your mum go*

194 Becky: oh. I think so. I'm just glad that she's making me and that she cares

195 *what does she do now?*

196 Becky: she works at S'port college with computers or something as a support worker to help

197 people with problems

198 *what about your dad*

199 Becky: he's a joiner
 200 *did he go to university or college?*
 201 Becky: I'm not sure. I think he went to college I'm not sure about university
 202 *thanks Annie what does your mum do?*
 203 Annie: she works in a home with disabled people
 204 *Did she go to university?*
 205 Annie: no
 206 *what about your dad?*
 207 Annie: no
 208 *do your parents feel that you should go to university?*
 209 Annie: yes
 210 *why?*
 211 Annie: they think it's important if I want a good career
 212 *What do you understand by 'career' because I've been speaking about 'jobs', what is the*
 213 *difference?*
 214 Chris: a job would be a part time thing, but if you were committed to it it would
 215 be a career
 216 *Annie, what do you mean by 'career', because you said you wanted to go to university to get*
 217 *a good career*
 218 Annie: don't know
 219 *why is being a teacher or a psychologist a career?*
 220 Annie: (unsure)
 221 *you say your mum & dad want you to go to university... why do you want to go to*
 222 *university?*
 223 Annie: cos I want to have a good future
 224 *you don't feel there's pressure?*
 225 Annie: no
 226 *Chris, what do your mum & dad do?*
 227 Chris: My mum works in a primary school and my dad, well I don't really know what he
 228 does, but he's really, really good on computers, he's got his own company, he works abroad,
 229 and he fixes other people's computers
 230 *did they both go to university?*
 231 Chris: my mum didn't go to university, but my dad did.
 232 *do they want you to go? Cos you said that they don't involve themselves very much in trying*
 233 *to persuade you what to do*
 234 Chris: my dad does, but my mum doesn't
 235 *she doesn't want you to go to university?*
 236 Chris: she does want me to, but she's more interested in like here and now, like the SATs
 237 and how well I do in that, she wants me to focus on the school work, and my dad's more
 238 thinking about my future because he's saying he'll support my funds to go to uni or college
 239 or something like that, but when the time comes he will be there for me to fall back on
 240 *After what you said about your mum, do you feel it's important to do well now?*
 241 Chris: yeah, because if you don't do well now, then what are you going to do about
 242 university, because you're not going to know half the stuff that you're meant to know
 243 *but what do you need if you're going to go to university?*
 244 Chris: probably good grades, a lot of knowledge, probably know what you want to do, and
 245 probably your funds as well.
 246 *money's important then*
 247 Chris: yes, but it's sort of erm I could get a job somewhere else, like I could work for my dad
 248 when I'm older to support my funds, and my dad'll do like half the funds as well.

249 *so are you wanting to go to university because people will earn more*
 250 Chris: yes, and you'll get like better qualifications, and I wanna be like my dad.
 251 *Annie, are you like that? Do you want to go to university because you'll earn more? Annie, is*
 252 *there anything more important than that? Because the job you're describing is sort of helping*
 253 *other people isn't it? Is that why you want to do something like teaching or psychology?*
 254 Annie: erm I don't know, I just find it interesting
 255 *Becky (your job isn't really about helping people is it, so), why do you want to be a journalist*
 256 Becky: cos I'm good at English and I like writing
 257 *is it important to you to get a job that pays well*
 258 Becky: it scares me to think that when I'm older you've got to support your own family like
 259 Chris said, and buy your own house, cos now, you live off your mum and her money, but
 260 when you're older you've got to do it all on your own & it scares me so I want to get the best
 261 I can get.
 262 *so Chris: & Em, you see yourselves as kind of family people in the future?*
 263 *(they agree)*
 264 *What do you think you'll be doing in 10 years time?*
 265 Annie: I'm not sure
 266 Pause
 267 *Chris you mentioned careers that were technical, do you like that sort of thing?*
 268 Chris: I prefer arts and crafts and stuff, but if I really stuck at it, I could do really well at IT
 269 & science, cos I'm willing to learn loads in IT & science and I could learn a lot off my dad as
 270 well.
 271 *are they all 'boys jobs'?*
 272 Chris: well I'm not going to do a girls job!
 273 *What would you describe as a girls job? (to girls) we'll let you fight back in a minute!*
 274 Chris: hairdresser
 275 *you wouldn't do that?*
 276 Chris: no, unless it was a barber.
 277 *Annie, do you think there's jobs for women and jobs for men*
 278 *?*
 279 Annie: no, depends (indistinct) on people
 280 *Chris's wrong is he?*
 281 Annie: yeah!
 282 *would you be a builder?*
 283 Annie: no
 284 *why not?*
 285 Annie: it's not my thing
 286 *how about you Becky*
 287 Becky: I don't see a girl being a builder, I mean... if a girl was a tomboy, then if that's what
 288 she really wants to do, then so be it but I wouldn't like to be a builder either.
 289 *is that what your parents might say as well?*
 290 Becky: don't know
 291 Pause
 292 Chris: me & my mates don't talk about it
 293 Pause
 294 *what about the timescale of things going on now*
 295 Is this something you're going to be thinking about all the time?
 296 Becky: yes, definitely, I think about the SATs and I think about them all the time and I'm
 297 worried about what'll happen when I get to year 11.
 298 *why are you particularly worried about the SATs?*

299 Chris: you have to do well through your classwork
 300 Becky: you've got to do well throughout all your work to show that you're capable of kinda
 301 like grades and achieve what you want
 302 Annie: I'm the same, cos if you don't like get good grades in SATs then you'll not get put in
 303 good sets in year 10 & 11.
 304 *Do your teachers remind you of this all the time?*
 305 All yes
 306 *where do you expect to find the most useful source of information?*
 307 Annie: not sure
 308 *you've seen your sister, so you've obviously got some idea of what goes on...*
 309 Becky: I've always thought it was college or university – they're a good place to learn things.
 310 Chris: the most likely sources are probably your family or the school you go to
 311 *do you ever pick anything up from the TV, like on Hollyoaks?*
 312 Chris: I don't normally watch TV, I'm doing other stuff, I'm normally out all the time. I like
 313 engineering on my bike, cos I put my own tyres on cos I got a set for Christmas and it's taken
 314 me ages to put tyres on, but I've done it and it's really good
 315 *Do you watch loads of soaps*
 316 Becky: I mostly like the computer... I used to watch soaps quite a lot; I've mostly gone off it
 317 now because it's mostly the same things. My mum watches a lot of geography programs like
 318 weather and disasters and I'm sat at the computer while my mum's watching tv, and I'll catch
 319 bits and like they're really interesting, but it sometimes puts me off, like the weather it's
 320 really scary but it's interesting
 321 *How about you Annie, what sort of TV do you watch?*
 322 Annie: soaps, and I like watching the news
 323 *do you see the people in the soaps and say, hey I could do that?*
 324 Annie: no, not really
 325 *what do you think the school offers to help you make your choices?*
 326 Annie: not sure
 327 Becky: They're happy with advice, like if you ask, they'll give you tell you what they know
 328 [pause] you could ask teachers
 329 *what do you expect the school to do for you to help you make your decision?*
 330 Chris: you've learned quite a lot off the school and they'll help you get qualifications
 331 *what have schools done in the past to help you? I mean going right back to infant school even*
 332 Chris: probably lessons where you've learned everyday things, for like a maths lesson in
 333 primary school where it's easier to understand about jobs and the reality of life.
 334 Becky: I don't really remember, like, people telling me about my future, but when I was
 335 taking my SATs in year 6, I was worried about it then like, and I wasn't aware of .. like year
 336 9 or anything.. I was aware of it but I wasn't that worried.
 337 *when did you start wanting to be a journalist?*
 338 Becky: I think it might have been year 6
 339 *can you remember why?*
 340 Becky: lots of people were telling me I should be one
 341 *who?*
 342 Becky: my family and sometimes friends
 343 *and is that because you write well?*
 344 Becky: some people find horoscopes silly, but a lot of horoscopes have told me I should be a
 345 Journalist
 346 *Annie?*
 347 Annie: I always wanted to be a teacher
 348 *can you remember what it was that started you off?*

349 Annie: I always liked working with kids
350 *when did you want to be a policeman?*
351 Chris: only recently – I've started to develop, and enjoy PE
352 I built a go-kart in year 3 and I've always liked to build stuff.
353 *What would your teachers say if you came back as Sgt Chris?*
354 Chris: they'd be proud they'd taught me and how I'd got there?
355 *Annie?*
356 Annie: Me as well
357 Becky: If I became a journalist my English teacher would be quite proud.
358 *does your English teacher know you want to be a journalist?*
359 Becky: I don't think so, but in year 8 we had Drama with my English teacher and we got her
360 now, and I used to have English with her in year 7,, it's only now I'm in set 1 that I've got
361 her for English again & I haven't really had a chance to tell her
362 *Any questions you want to ask?*
363 Becky: When you were our age, were you scared about what was going to happen, and did
364 you? Cos I think now, I want to be a journalist & I'm scared I won't be able to do it.
365 Chris: how old were you when you first did really well in something and what was your
366 favourite subject in school?

Annex 3

Sample staff interview: Head of Year (“H”) Interviewer (I) in italics

- 1 *I: tell me about the options book – what’s the difference between the general pathway and the*
2 *vocational pathway*
3 H: obviously it depends which band you go into and how academic you are, and that’s based on
4 KS3 results so at the minute in year 9 they’ve actually been ranked, in order of how they’ve done
5 .. based on maths English science, and also some other subjects teacher assessments as well.
6 *I: so the whole school is ranked from 1-200 [approx intake is 200 per year]*
7 H: yeah, the cut off is about erm 110, something like that... 115...
8 *I: what if number 115 is cleverer than no 96 last year?*
9 H: obviously that’s something we have to take on board – it’s X’s job [X is Assistant
10 Headteacher] to explain to the parents and whatnot ... obviously there are one or two difficulties
11 ... obviously we’ve got one case of a lad who’s quite able who’s underachieved but is it fair
12 on the others? It’s a tricky one. The only fall back in a way is that H1 can be put into GCSE
13 Science – they do GCSE Science – after the last Ofsted we made sure that happened.
14 *I: so even though they’re on the vocational pathway...*
15 H: they do GCSE science.
16 *I: how does this year’s year 9 compare with last year? The SAT results are a bit better aren’t*
17 *they – are the kids better?*
18 H: or are our interventions having an effect? Certainly in the science department I think we’ve
19 learned quite a lot over the last few years in terms of interventions we’ve done.... last year we
20 spent a lot of time and money into getting level 5s ... which went up... this year we spent time
21 and went to local university they organised a day ‘stretching 6 [?] and level 6 & 7 went up... so
22 whether that’s a knock-on effect of the re-jigging of the ks3 curriculum and changing our focus
23 in lessons and things onto scientific enquiry so obviously all these things are having an effect.
24 *I: the next thing is about how the kids come to their decisions...what are the influences?*
25 H: [pause]... er... to be honest because this is ks3 to ks4 it’s really other people that take this
26 over so I don’t really have a handle on this in any great detail but experience says it depends
27 which band they are in...and obviously they take it from there some things have to be re-
28 jugged ... to be honest I haven’t a clue! Really it’s run by Martin, Angie and Janet.
29 *I: are you aware of parents influencing kids at all?*
30 H: not directly, but I haven’t sat down with a kid and talked to them about that ... i think the
31 parental influence would be ‘do the best you can’ & making sure you’re in the academic band
32 but in the same breath, the parents are quite happy and have quite realistic opinions
33 *I: what about the kid on a vocational pathway and the parent comes in and says ‘they’re not*
34 *doing that’?*
35 H: that is rare. Maybe one or two, but it’s always tricky where you draw that line. And i think
36 one of the ways we’ve addressed it is certainly H1 can be timetabled so they don’t necessarily
37 have to follow [vocational courses] – the example quoted there is the H1 class doing GCSE...
38 *I: is there a difference in the way boys and girls approach their options?*
39 H:[pause] difficult one that?

40 *I: In the interviews so far, boys and girls are all saying there's no reason why anyone shouldn't*
 41 *do a particular job, but they all went for jobs that matched their gender...*
 42 H: that's ingrained from birth isn't that sort of outlook on things?
 43 *I: is there any evidence of that in science?*
 44 H: Not that I'm aware of when I'm teaching
 45 *I: are there any other groups (eg social) where it makes a difference?*
 46 H: er... the problems tend to be ability-related don't they? How able they are to cope with it...
 47 *I: are the more able kids more advantaged some way?*
 48 H: I would suspect there is a stronger interest at home and i think that would apply across all the
 49 subjects as well.
 50 *I: how can you tell*
 51 H: comments from the kids, parents evening
 52 *I: because those are the parents that turn up?*
 53 H: turn up, interested, It's a difficult one to provide evidence for but certainly yeah you'd have a
 54 feeling that if you had a top set you'd assume that the backgrounds would mostly be quite stable
 55 and parents would be quite interested in what they're doing and they'd be pushing their kids to
 56 do very well. Whereas at the other end of the spectrum you'd say ... I mean this is generalisation,
 57 but the weighting would be towards the other end ... maybe disaffected parents....
 58 *I: are these the prosperous parents?*
 59 H: not necessarily, I wouldn't say it's money related, it depends on the parents really – their
 60 values and how they value education and how their educational experience has been as well
 61 *I: you deal with quite a lot of parents don't you – is this mostly disciplinary?*
 62 H: well, that's changing now, it's a matter of progress as well
 63 *I: do you approach them because they're making good progress or poor progress?*
 64 H: that's one of the things we're going to do next year .. it's a new role for me [remodelling the
 65 workforce] this year. I mean the pastoral side's still there but now I'm monitoring kids ...
 66 progress, and progress cohorts and things like that.
 67 10:35
 68 *I: Quite a few things you've opened up there – monitoring the kids... which kids do you monitor?*
 69 H: all of them
 70 *I: which kids do you intervene with?*
 71 H: the ones who are not achieving their targets
 72 *I: according to the Fischer Family Trust?*
 73 H: yes... based on their key stage 2 scores... at the moment what we've done, the year 7 & 8
 74 reports have gone out now and we've taken the levels off there and we try and look at the year
 75 groups ... they're in bands at the moment, and we're looking at...
 76 *I: so kids that are lower down than they should be are the ones that you intervene, so you call the*
 77 *parents in...*
 78 H: yeah.... first of all we set up interventions, whatever that might be ... depends on the nature of
 79 the kid ... I mean wait there and I'll get some of the stuff we're working on and show you what
 80 we do...
 81 H: [returns with paperwork] right – key stage 3, we're talking bands now...when they come in
 82 from year 6 ... at the minute now... we get all the raw scores in from primary schools and put
 83 them into three bands: two mirror bands and we take the bottom 50-odd and put them in the 'K-
 84 band'
 85 *I: mirror bands mean the two halves are doing the same thing?*

86 H: yeah, called F and H based on which half of the year they're in, so there's three groups within
87 that ... so we've got six classes of similar ability ... within that, maths and English set ... but in
88 the K-band we have the bottom 50 kids, the kids that are struggling, they have more English and
89 maths, and for science the two classes are split into three groups for the core subjects so they get
90 more help.

91 *I: So you intervene as soon as these kids show signs of falling behind ...*

92 h: yeah, we've got three reports a year now ... we used to have a mid-year report and a full
93 written report, but what they get now is every term either a full written report or the levels,
94 grades and whatnot

95 *I: so the intervention at a low level will be with the kid itself and just 'buck your ideas up' ... does
96 that work?*

97 H: [shows tables of level scores (teacher assessments) with colour coding – about half the grid is
98 shaded, of which 2/3 to 3/4 are on or above target.]

99 H: orange is on target, pink is above target, green is below target. By one level or more

100 *I: unshaded means?*

101 H: Either just above or just below by one sublevel.

102 This is done at the end of the year ... we're looking at how often we do it.

103 *I: I want to ask about what you do when the parents come in...because this'll give good evidence
104 of parental attitudes to kids' progress to see what influence kids have on outcomes*

105 *I: in the K-band how many interventions have taken place in the last year or so?*

106 H: [thinks] that's a tricky one, this year I've been finding my feet ... maybe ten.

107 *I: are the parents positive when you do this?*

108 H: yes

109 *I: what do you mean by positive?*

110 H: well they show an interest.

111 *I: what about the parents that don't show up?*

112 H: we have a parent support officer who goes out to the home ... on a Thursday afternoon she
113 does home visits... so for a variety of reasons... those hard-to-reach parents...

114 *I: is there a difference socially between kids in the K-band*

115 H: [thinks] not as much as you'd expect – i suppose you'd expect the kids to be more
116 disadvantaged but having known the kids for the last couple of years, but ... no.

117 *I: How many parents make an intervention if their kids aren't doing well enough?*

118 H: the ones that are switched on and ...

119 *I: so there are parents that come in..?*

120 H: yes, we even had one parent come in and had gone through the list and done their own
121 highlighting,part of the problem we've got here you sometimes go through and see is certain
122 subjects, nobody ever hits the target, which is quite frustrating, and they tend to be the non-core
123 subjects – foundation subjects I think find it difficult to actually set targets, and then their
124 assessments are actually..... So sometimes we can actually shoot ourselves in the foot and
125 obviously we've got to be careful if the targets we're setting in year 7 & 8 match up with the
126 FFT target, and once that's been set for the year you shouldn't really be tinkering, moving it up
127 or down... if a kid meets or even exceeds a target it's cause for celebration rather than 'oh let's
128 knock the bar up again'

129 *I: These parents that come in, have they been from the K-band?*

130 H: no, they're from H & F I'd say [the two mirror bands]

131 H: having said that, there's one case of a kid from year 8 where the mother pushed and wanted
 132 the kid out of the K-band and she's been on my back all year – it's a difficult one because she's
 133 desperate for ... you know ... 'he's able blah blah blah'...when he's ranked and is consistently
 134 showing that. After the year 8 exams... and she knew they were coming, and she'd been in and
 135 seen the boss and everything, you see he'd done his CAT test and got a low score – he didn't
 136 finish all the questions
 137 *I: do you know anything about their social background?*
 138 H: fine, nice area, nice family, but I don't think the kids are particularly bright
 139 *I: so it's a family with cultural capital*
 140 H: trying to do the best for...
 141 *I: he's not getting the cultural capital they demand with that background*
 142 H: yeah, and we're at fault, we're doing things wrong
 143 *I: this is where you get a conflict, where, ...expectation exceeds ability*
 144 H: and realism
 145
 146 *I: are you aware of teaching about careers as you teach?*
 147 H: sort of, it's implicit in what you teach... it's a difficulty with kids sometimes, they don't
 148 realise there's a connection...it's the way you phrase questions... I was doing pupil voice
 149 yesterday with Assessment for Learning and you kind of say things or ask questions as it's
 150 written and you need to rephrase or reword or give an example of what actually goes on
 151 [pause]
 152
 153 *I: to what extent have you monitored the effect of these interventions?*
 154 H: across the board, whole year-group interventions, if there's a problem with the subject, there
 155 should be a subject intervention...as I said before with the science, I know for a fact that science
 156 interventions have seemingly...had an effect, the overall science results have improved.
 157 *I: have the individual kids been monitored where there's been an intervention?*
 158 H: yes we have our targets set, and every kid is checked and when we get the results in we
 159 double check.
 160 *I: have you drawn on the LA or govt or research initiatives?*
 161 H: Every Child Matters
 162 *I: is this a direct response to ECM*
 163 H: well, it's a shift of focus from the Govt and Ofsted isn't it? Makes it quite clear that
 164 inspections now are based all on
 165 Every teacher would welcome this move away from past history where a kid comes in, we
 166 teach them, they go out, and they either get the score or they don't, and that's a disservice to
 167 them isn't it? They maybe haven't been monitored, they haven't been checked as to whether
 168 they're achieving that, and it's a disservice to the parents as well. But I think now the ECM
 169 agenda, I think every child has a right to know they're being watched and being checked and that
 170 if things aren't right somebody is stepping in as the difficulty is drilling down to individual
 171 level isn't it?
 172 *I: so the response to ECM is 'right, we'll do it this way' and it's not that Ofsted or the LA or*
 173 *research have shown*
 174 H: it's a whole educational shift isn't it towards this, and as I said I think any teacher would
 175 welcome the fact that
 176 *I: who was it said 'this is the way we're going to do it'? the Head, research, etc*

177 H: it's a learning curve isn't it? All schools are in the same boat and obviously we've had
 178 training and whatnot [from where] er from outside agencies, the LA coordinator's been in...
 179 some of the schools used to have money set aside for professional development er... what
 180 we've got now is a group of schools employ one or two consultants who provide the training
 181 *I: it used to be the advisor coming in?*
 182 H: so last year when we got this new job [year leader] we got two days of training [from a
 183 freelance consultant] and we went through all this data processing...
 184 *I: ...and basically he said 'this is a good way of doing it' and you said 'let's give it a go'?*
 185 H: well he's been on [organised] other courses as well
 186 *I: so you said 'we've got a problem, and there's an expert who can help us'*
 187 H: and I went on the national strategy
 188 *I: and are the numbers on these grids starting to go up?*
 189 H: well we can't say that yet because it's the first year we've been doing it...but we'll look at the
 190 end of key stage results and year 7 and 8
 191
 192 *I: are there some pupils that are beyond help?*
 193 H: being realistic there are always going to be one or two that 'fall off', but there you have to
 194 prove and show that you've done some interventions
 195 *I: it used to be the case where the SAT results would come out 5% short (10 kids) so you'd pour*
 196 *all your efforts into those 10 kids at the expense of the over 190. What you're describing is that*
 197 *every kid is singled out if they're not achieving as well.*
 198 H: what we've done this year is we've gone through and identified kids who've got at least a
 199 subject – met the target or exceeded it and we've written letters home saying that to the parents.
 200 And that's all-ability kids, letters in the K-band have gone home as well, which is nice.
 201 H: the other interesting thing is that one or two of our behaviour problems have met their targets,
 202 so... their behaviour may have damaged other people's chances, but .. that's a bit of an odd thing
 203 that's struck me with all this – you kind of make the assumption that the kid's prating around
 204 and a bloody nuisance in class and their progress will suffer and then it doesn't! That's not
 205 always the case, but it does happen.
 206 *I: Are the FFT results based on past results when they were still prating around and therefore is*
 207 *it their 'prating score'? Is it galling when they suddenly do rather well?*
 208 H: well no, I've sort of made an executive decision [in cases like that] not to send that letter
 209
 210
 211 H: there is a bit of a change now ... the kids know we expect targets – I had four kids in
 212 yesterday from year 7 for the Pupil Voice thing and interestingly I asked them 'do you know
 213 what your target is?' and they weren't quite sure as obviously it's a lot of numbers and letters
 214 and so on, but when I asked if they'd met their targets 'oh yes, I've met it'.
 215
 216 *I: what can you do to help kids translate this into careers advice?*
 217 H: kids are entering school now, when they leave, the jobs they go into have not been made yet,
 218 or they will have changed beyond recognition
 219
 220 ...
 221 H: is it a fact that the subjects you enjoyed most was science? The advice you always give is you
 222 take the subjects you enjoy

223
224

Annex 4 – the data coding process

Part one – coded data from the transcripts: codes from Stage 1 interview 1

Highlighted section shows data from code 4 – Perceptions of University

Theme	Lines	Phrases
Financial – funds needed for University	262	<i>money's important then</i> Chris: yes, but it's sort of erm I could get a job somewhere else, like I could work for my dad when I'm older to support my funds, and my dad'll do like half the funds as well.
Grades for university		
University – destinations	169	<i>have you thought about going to university?</i> Becky: yes <i>you said yes Becky?</i> Becky: yeah – definitely going <i>Annie?</i> Annie: yeah <i>ok Chris?</i>
University – perceptions	177	<i>you said you might be a builder</i> Chris: I know yeah but.. <i>it's not that I'm saying there's anything wrong with being a builder, but you don't need to go to university</i> Chris: I know but it's like, a job you can fall back on if you know what I mean. Cos if you want to go to university to study to be like a policeman can't you? <i>yes, but you can also be a policeman without going to university</i> Chris: yeah, but I want to be, like as qualified as I can
	235	<i>you say your mum & dad want you to go to university... why do you want to go to university?</i> Annie: cos I want to have a good future
	255	<i>After what you said about your mum, do you feel it's important to do well now?</i> Chris: yeah, because if you don't do well now, then what are you going to do about university, because you're not going to know half the stuff that you're meant to know <i>but what do you need if you're going to go to university?</i> Chris: probably good grades, a lot of knowledge, probably

	332	<p>know what you want to do, and probably your funds as well. <i>so are you wanting to go to university because people will earn more</i></p> <p>Chris: yes, and you'll get like better qualifications, and I wanna be like my dad.</p> <p>Becky: I've always thought it was college or university – they're a good place to learn things</p>
Perceptions of ability	<p>81</p> <p>92</p>	<p><i>so Becky, what's your strongest subject?</i></p> <p>Becky: erm it's either French or English maths & geog are my weakest</p> <p><i>yeah... where do you feel you fit in your maths class?</i></p> <p>Becky: erm well im in set 3 so its kind of low, I don't think im really stupid, but (laughs) I'm not that good</p> <p>Annie: my favourite subjects are re and hist but I'm not very good at maths</p> <p>Chris: my favourite subjects are german, maths, geography and pe. And my worst subjects are re and history</p>

Part two – data from all interviews grouped together into one code

All data from the transcribed interviews which relate to code 4 (Perceptions of University)

Stage 1 interview 1	Stage 1 interview 1	Stage 1 interview 4
1 Chris: yeah, because if you don't do well now, then what are you going to do about university, because you're not going to know half the stuff that you're meant to know	4 <i>so are you wanting to go to university because people will earn more</i>	1 <i>Jasmina, do you want to go to uni.... You sound fairly sure....do you know what course?</i>
2 <i>but what do you need if you're going to go to university?</i>	5 Chris: yes, and you'll get like better qualifications, and I wanna be like my dad.	2 Jasmina: yes.... No
3 Chris: probably good grades, a lot of knowledge, probably know what you want to do, and probably your funds as well.	6 Becky: I've always thought it was college or university – they're a good place to learn things	3 <i>How will your subject choices influence what you do at uni</i>
		4 Jasmina: it could make it easier to do more courses and get a good career...er English, because it's a subject that every one needs

Stage 2 interview 2	Stage 2 interview 4	Stage 2 interview 6
<i>M: What's university like?</i>	<i>M: what will it be like at university?</i>	<i>M: what does your mum think?</i>
1 Emma: it's just a way of getting to where I want to be in life	1 Mike No, I didn't say that....[Paul: yes you did!]	Sarah: she agrees – what I say goes [laughs] they didn't go to university, my dad wants me to go. If I don't end up acting I've always got the papers that I've been to college and it's better to do that than not to go cos if I've left high school doing nothing ... trying to get into drama ... but if I've gone to university then I've got a good chance. You get into contact with people.
2 Diane: it's just like a big 2-year holiday [sixth form college] – that's the way my brother described it, family have told him uni is a big party. I want to do [sixth form] college, but I don't really know if I want to do university – I don't want to set in stone that I'm going to be a fashion designer, cos I haven't even gone into year 10 yet and I haven't done college or anything so I don't really know – I'll see how I feel about it after college	2 M: you said posh kids get good grades....	
3 Frank: I don't just want to go to university for the degree – it's an experience – obviously I want to get the degree and that, but I want to go for the partying and that and it'll be a good laugh [Emma nods]	6 Mike. I don't mean that, it's just... to go to Oxford... cos.. you just see them walking around like...being snobby and everything, like...you can just imagine I'd be there and ...	

Stage 3 interview 1		
1 Paul It looks good ...[why do you say that?] ... just cos... I was thinking of being a pilot [boys all laugh] [girls say aah, no, leave him] ... well everybody else is going.	4 Mike No, I didn't say that....[Paul: yes you did!]	7 Jasmina: when you apply to Oxford or Cambridge, they're like, world known aren't they ... you got like 120 people trying to fight for every place... just to get into university, so I think that's what most people are scared of...
2 Paul: you've got to sit and work all the time...	5 M: you said posh kids get good grades....	
3 Mike. You wouldn't get in with all grade Cs - that's why I think they're all posh kids M: why do you say that? You think posh kids go to university?	6 Mike. I don't mean that, it's just... to go to Oxford... cos.. you just see them walking around like...being snobby and everything, like...you can just imagine I'd be there and ...	

Stage 3 interview 2		
1 Chloe: Chloe doesn't think so! It's hard work (and partying if you can!)	5 you think of poor people don't you!] [laughs] [Emily: average... normal]	9 Diane: I hate how they single them out, like Oxford is the clever people uni ... why can't everybody go to any uni that they want to?
2 Hazel: it's not uni if you don't party	6 Diane: very academic, hard working people	10 Hazel: cos then, people who are only average and you're really clever [Diane: yeah but at uni you learn on your own, don't you] It's like X (pupil from lower band) being in one of our lessons – how pointless would that be?
3 Diane: but it's not like school where everyone's behind a desk with everyone else and you get held back... you have to go and do it yourself at uni don't you?	7 Hazel: I hate how you categorise it into that	11 Diane: cos I want to do anything apart from sitting at a desk writing ... if I go to university it's a lot of theory and I don't want to do that at all. It's more like hard work than enjoyment of the practical stuff
4 Emily: loads of... different people can go ... of different abilities [Chloe: when you say student, you don't think of posh people]	8 Heather: or just naturally clever people who don't have to do anything	

Part 3 – all data from single theme

Coded data, from the theme “Encountering an imagined field: University					
Name	Ambition	Parents (bold = university)	Influence	University	
Annie	1. Teacher or psychologist 2. no comment 3. absent	Mum= care worker No pressure	Sister does psychology	Yes – English	“Annie: cos I want to have a good future”
Becky	1. Model – journalist to fall back on 2. no comment 3. doctor	‘you are going’ (step mum) Mum= TA F=joiner	Lots of people suggesting it	Yes	Becky: I’ve always thought it was college or university – they’re a good place to learn things Loads of people of different abilities...normal...average...
Chris	1. Policeman (or builder/plumber if not grades) 2: pharmacist 3. absent	‘not bothered’ M=school admin F= it consultant	Cousin is a pharmacist	hopefully	Would get a job with father for funds; Something to fall back on – be as qualified as you can. Got to do well now, why wait until university?
Diane	1. Fashion designer 2. no comment 3. own business	F=restaurateur M=housewife Wanted to do hairdressing but parents wouldn’t allow, ditto catering course	Big brother at college Friend is a fashion designer	Yes ‘it’s what my parents want’ Don’t really know whether I want to	Stage 1/2: Is it difficult to get to uni? Depends how badly I’ll want it. It’s what my mum and dad want. It’s like a big holiday. Don’t know if it’s what I’ll want yet. Stage 3: you can get a loan; is Oxford cheaper because she got a scholarship? Can’t go if you haven’t got the grades...don’t like the idea of sitting behind a desk... it’s not like school is it? You’ve got to do it for yourself. Diane: it’s that whole ‘grade A, class 1’ thing we did in media ... it’s unlikely that a family who consists of not very well paid jobs to have a child that attends Oxford ... because if [interrupted] Diane: they can afford to be clever – they can get tutors and stuff can’t they [Gemma: from an early age] on the programme ‘Gossip Girl’ because they want to get into Harvard and because of her family history and because of who they are it gave her an advantage and she got in M: is uni a strange place with strange posh people? Diane, are there people like you at University? Diane: yeah – that wouldn’t be a problem at all.
Emma	1. police 2. no comment 3. Accountant	M=careers adviser F= marketing manager Strong influence	Sister at uni, teacher training		Stage 1: ‘normal family’; Oxford’s actually cheaper for rent; you get a loan which you can pay off easily Stage 3: you need to be clever....I’ll never do well enough for myself...I want to go far away (my sisters did) It’s just a way of getting to where I want to be.
Frank	1: don’t know	Grandparents, retired,	Grandfather &	1: No (financial)	Stage 1: don’t know about uni – because of the money.

	2: run own business like grandfather & uncle (building?) 3. absent	owned own business	uncle running own business	2: yes – been there, liked it.	Stage 2: (after trip) I suppose you will be earning more after uni and can afford to pay the loan. Frank: I don't just want to go to university for the degree – it's an experience – obviously I want to get the degree and that, but I want to go for the partying and that and it'll be a good laugh [Emma nods]
Gemma	1. Don't know 2. 'famous' 3. PE teacher	F=financial adviser M=housewife	None	Yes – I'll get there if I want to	Stage 1: Don't know if parents went. I think I'll go; not sure, but I don't know why. Stage 3: Wants to go local
Hazel	1. Something with children 2. no comment 3. teacher	M=police F= police Encouraging	Cousin = teacher; Aunt=nursery nurse	1: Not thought 2: yes	Stage 1: haven't really thought about uni Stage 3: you need to have money to fund it...my parents could (for sister) but didn't. Wants to go to Leeds (knows people; partying); [justifying uni as being for clever people]; when people are average and you're really clever – pointless having people who can't keep up
Ian	1. Physiotherapist 2. physiotherapist 3. absent	F=mechanic M=office worker	Friend training at uni		If I pass my GCSEs
Jasmina	1. travel, 'help people' 2. still travel 3. photographer	F=technician (owns on shop) M=teacher Pressure and encouragement	Wide family network Talked to cousins about subject choice	yes	Stage 2: want to go (vague); a subject like English because it's one everyone needs Stage 3: as far away from here as possible; Getting into Oxford is difficult because 120 people are fighting for every place...that's what most are scared of.
Kate	1. Flight attendant 2. no comment 3. Flight attendant	F=builder M=cleaner	Father's friend=flight attendant	No – straight into airline("always wanted to be a hairdresser")	No quotes.
Liam	1. Lawyer 2. haven't a clue 3. don't know	M=nurse F=customs officer		Brother & sister both gone Like to go	Stage 2: I'll go to uni, but I haven't a clue what career. It's hard, with lots of hard work.
Mike	1. Artist or art teacher 2.ditto 3. don't know	M=F=art teacher	Parents	Yes – loads of pressure from parents	Stage 1: Art teacher – want to go to Liverpool because it's got a big art centre. Don't discuss much with parents Stage 3: Not good enough for Oxford – might not get good enough GCSEs
Natalie	1. Something with animals – not social work (bad experience) 2. child psychology 3. absent	M=F=unemployed	Friend = hairdresser Has seen a child psychologist	1: not sure 2: would like to go because of trip	Stage 1: to get into uni you need science and subjects like that.. will go to college...Uni? Yes.
Oliver	1. Accounting or business 2. accountant? Not a doctor	F=own business (swimming pools) M= bed manager (hospital)	Father's own business		Stage 3: Different universities have different standards. Hard to get in Oxford

	3. dentist				
Paul	1. Maybe a chef 2. scoffed when reminded 'could be a pilot' 3. don't know	M=F=podiatrist	Doesn't know any chefs	Yes	Stage 1: get a degree to get a better job Stage 3: There's debts – want to stay near home. You go there and you don't know people; if you stay near you can always come back. You've got to sit and work all the time.
Richard	1. Not a clue, maybe in a suit 2. no comment 3. absent	F=absent M= pharmacist (formerly chef)			Stage 1: got to get good GCSEs Stage 2: Yes (mum wants me to go)
Sarah	1. 'famous' 2. actress 3. absent	M=housewife F=builder	Has an agent (sister's friend) Connexions interview (special needs register)	Probably – parents encouraging	Stage 2: My mum agrees – what I say goes! I want to act, but if I don't end up acting then if I've got nothing...if I've gone to university then I've got a better chance.

Annex 5

Extract from Options Booklet – pages 1-4 of 36. The remaining pages provide information concerning individual courses

Key Stage 4 Courses

KEY STAGE 4 COURSES 2007 - 2009

This booklet gives you information about all the courses that are available in school for Key Stage 4 from September 2007.

The first few pages give information and advice about the different combinations of courses that may be followed. There is then a section with information about the Option Subjects and finally a section about the Core Examination Subjects.

Students and parents should read the information carefully and take time to decide on the best combination of subjects. Some of your lessons and other activities in the next few weeks will help you to make good decisions and give you some advice about how to plan your education, training and career.

We aim to provide courses that match students' preferences and we have a good record in achieving a very close match between students' preferences and the courses they are allocated.

Students do not choose their technology courses until late in the summer term.

IMPORTANT DATES

Thursday 16 th March	Option Preference Forms Issued
Wednesday 21 st March	Completed Preference Forms returned to Form Tutor

Key Stage 4 Courses

KEY STAGE 4 COURSES

Core Subjects

All students study RE, English, Maths, Science, ICT, Citizenship, Games and a Technology subject.

The Technology Courses available are:

Food Technology, Graphic Products, Resistant Materials, Product Design and Textile Technology.

Later in the school year students will be asked to express first and second preferences for their Technology subject and, wherever possible, will be allocated a course based on these preferences.

Pathways at Key Stage 4

Our courses at Key Stage 4 recognise that there are many different routes through the education system and we aim to provide as wide a range as possible. To make it easier students will be guided into one of two different 'Pathways'.

The General Pathway

The Vocational Pathway

Within each pathway there is range of choices that can be combined to give a balanced and high quality course for Key Stage 4. The combinations that can be chosen all have excellent opportunities for continuing education or training beyond the age of 16. Both pathways offer a mixture of Vocational and Traditional courses. The two Pathways are described in more detail on the next page.

Students will be guided to choose course combinations that are suited to their ability level, their future careers plans and their progress in subjects throughout KS3.

The courses are all offered conditional on appropriate number of students.

Key Stage 4 Courses

The General Pathway

This pathway will suit the majority of students. They will be committed to continuing in full time education to 18 and then continuing on to Higher Education. The combinations of courses are shown in the table below. Students following the General Pathway must choose one subject from each Option.

OPTION A	OPTION B	OPTION C
French German	Art French German Geography History Media Music	Art Business Child Development Drama Geography History Media PE

The Vocational Pathway

This pathway is for students who will achieve the best results by concentrating on the vocational aspects of their courses. All the courses give well established routes for continuing in full time education or training up to 18 with opportunities to progress to Higher Education.

The combinations available are shown in the table below. The First Diploma in Sport takes up both options, for any other choice students must choose one subject from each option.

OPTION A	OPTION B
Business Travel and Tourism Motor Vehicle Engineering Hairdressing	Art Child Development Drama Geography History PE
Sport	

NOTE: Students who choose to study Travel and Tourism in Option A may not choose Geography in Option B

Key Stage 4 Courses

To the Student:

This is a very important stage of your school career. The decisions you make now could affect the opportunities open to you in future. So, read this information thoroughly and think carefully about the choices you are going to make. Also, ask for advice from those in a position to help you - your parents, your teachers and the careers advisers - we all want the best for you.

When making your choices be realistic! Here are some points to help you:

- ☺ *Do choose subjects you feel comfortable with*
- ☺ *Do choose subjects because you like them and not because your friend has chosen them*
- ☺ *Do seek advice and help if in any doubt*

Finally, please remember that the choices you make will not necessarily be possible. If too few people choose a subject it will be unlikely to run. However, we will do our very best to satisfy all choices.

To Parents:

Please help and encourage your child in making their choices and feel free to ask the school or Careers Service for help and advice.

- ☺ *However, please remember that it is your son or daughter who has to do the studying for the next two years and choices made unwillingly are likely to be problematic. You might have hopes of him or her becoming a brain surgeon but is that what he or she really wants??*

We are confident that the partnership of school, parents and student will produce the best possible educational opportunity and we look forward to working towards that goal.

Key Educational policy developments 1944-2007

I provide below a short summary of the most important developments in education policy since 1944, and till the beginnings of the commencement of the empirical study for this thesis in 2006.

1944-1964

The 1944 Education Act established a Ministry of Education for the first time, and charged Local Authorities with providing free, compulsory education in primary and secondary schools for all pupils from age 5-15. Under central guidance, most Local Authorities adopted a tripartite (or bipartite) selective system, although this was not specifically a requirement of the Act.

Debate continued throughout the 1950s as some Local Authorities (particularly the Inner London Education Authority and Leicestershire) experimented with forms of Comprehensivisation.

1964-1970

The 1964 Labour government's manifesto included a promise to remove selection at 11-plus, a process began of introducing comprehensive education across Labour authorities. However, the government stopped short of the compulsory introduction of comprehensive education, and many LEAs resisted pressure to change before the Conservatives won the 1970 general election and the policy reversed again. The introduction of the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) in 1965 resulted in the creation of segregated classes even within comprehensive schools, where the brighter pupils studied for GCEs separately.

1970-1979

Successive Labour and Conservative governments of the 1970s oversaw the progressive introduction of comprehensive schools so that by the time of the 1974 Labour

government, more than half of the country's children were educated in comprehensive schools. The 1976 Education act was introduced to end selection, but was unsuccessful as many LEAs used loopholes to avoid this. (The Conservatives repealed the Act in 1979).

1979-1990

The Thatcher governments of the 80s began their education policy with the 1979 Act, which gave LEAs the power to keep selective education systems in place and install parent representatives on governing bodies, and was followed by a succession of acts which gradually withdrew powers from LEAs either towards central government.

The second 1986 Act took steps further by ensuring that governing bodies had equal numbers of LEA and parent representatives. The marketisation of the education system was begun by the 1988 Education Reform Act, which introduced a National Curriculum and gave sweeping powers to the Secretary of State over all aspects of education, thus reducing further the influence of the LEAs. National tests were introduced at this time to promote the idea of a market place in which schools would be judged by how well their pupils performed in the tests.

Grant-maintained schools and City Technology Schools were introduced, controlled by central government rather than LEAs. In 1990 'top-up' loans designed to enable HE students to borrow money to pay living expenses were introduced to begin the process of scrapping the student grant

1990-1997

Under the next Conservative government, the process of marketisation was further strengthened by the introduction of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) in 1992, which regulated the inspection framework for schools. Grant-maintained schools received further support at the expense of Local Authority control.

1997-2007

New Labour were elected in 1997 with a promise to end selection in secondary schools. In fact the policies of the previous government were continued and extended – a series of measures saw the introduction of specialist schools and colleges, which were allowed a degree of selection in their admissions procedures. National Strategies were set up to improve standards in literacy and numeracy, and schools were given targets to raise standards. Under the 2006 Education and Inspections Act, schools could seek private sponsorship to become Trust Schools – effectively independent state schools. Local Authority involvement was reduced to a support mechanism for parents, but LAs were to have no control over the running of schools. Under this Act, Ofsted had the power to close ‘failing’ schools, and parents would be able to set up new schools.

For the construction of this summary, I have drawn on a number of references, particularly in relation to the periodisation of policy developments. Particularly useful references have been:

Garratt, D. and Forrester, G. (2012) *Education policy unravelled*. London: Continuum.

Gillard D (2011) *Education in England: a brief history*, available online at www.educationengland.org.uk/history [accessed 25/11/14]

Jones, K. (2003) *Education in Britain: 1944 to the present*. Cambridge: Polity Press.